

THE NORTHERN WORLD    BRILL

# Queen Margrete I (1353-1412) and the Founding of the Nordic Union



Vivian Etting



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QUEEN MARGRETE I (1353-1412)  
AND THE FOUNDING OF THE NORDIC UNION

# THE NORTHERN WORLD

North Europe and the Baltic c. 400-1700 AD  
Peoples, Economies and Cultures

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VOLUME 9



# QUEEN MARGRETE I (1353-1412) AND THE FOUNDING OF THE NORDIC UNION

BY

VIVIAN ETTING



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## LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

|          |                                                                        |
|----------|------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| A.P.D.   | Acta pontificum Danica                                                 |
| B.S.H.   | Bidrag till Skandinaviens historia ur utländska arkiver                |
| Dipl.D.  | Diplomatarium Danicum                                                  |
| Dipl.F.  | Diplomatarium Flensburgense                                            |
| D.M.     | Danske Magasin                                                         |
| Dipl.N.  | Diplomatarium Norvegicum                                               |
| D.R.B.   | Danmarks Riges Breve                                                   |
| H.C.     | Hansische Geschichtsblätter                                            |
| H.R.     | Hanserecesse                                                           |
| H.T.     | Historisk Tidsskrift (Danish)                                          |
| K.D.     | Kjøbenhavns Diplomatarium                                              |
| K.L.     | Kulturhistorisk leksikon for nordisk middelalder                       |
| K.S.     | Kirkehistoriske Samlinger                                              |
| L.U.B.   | Lübeckisches Urkundenbuch                                              |
| M.P.     | Molbech og Petersen: Udvalg af hidtil utrykte Danske Diplomer og Breve |
| M.U.     | Mecklenburgisches Urkundenbuch                                         |
| N.D.M.   | Nye Danske Magasin                                                     |
| Rep.Dan. | Repertorium diplomaticum regni danici mediaevalis                      |
| S.D.     | Svenskt Diplomatarium                                                  |
| S.R.D.   | Scriptores rerum Danicarum                                             |
| S.R.P.   | Scriptores rerum Preussicarum                                          |
| S.R.S.   | Scriptores rerum Sveciacarum                                           |
| S.T.     | Sveriges Traktater med främmande magter                                |
| Æ.A.     | Ældste danske Archivregistraturer                                      |

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## PREFACE

“By God, if women had written stories, as the clergymen have done within their oratories, they would have written more about the wickedness of men than all the sons of Adam may redress.” This remark from the *Canterbury Tales*, which the 14thC author Geoffrey Chaucer puts in the mouth of the impetuous Wife of Bath, is perhaps a little out of place in a book about Queen Margrete of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. For as a female historian I must admit, that women who climb to the summit of power usually are just as ambitious and ruthless as their male colleagues.

This was certainly the case with Queen Margrete (1353–1412), who is considered to be one of the most important political figures in Nordic history. The founding of the Nordic Union in 1397 was of fundamental importance for the history of Northern Europe during the following centuries. No doubt the driving force behind this achievement was the queen’s ambition to attain a level of political influence which matched her abilities, intelligence and position in society. In this she clearly overcame the limitations which normally excluded women from political life, and it is noteworthy that she became regent of three kingdoms by election.

This book tries to describe her dramatic life, seen against the background of society at that time. It is addressed to all those interested in Nordic history, a subject on which (except for the Viking Age) there is very limited literature available in English. The text is a revised and translated version of the second edition of my book “Margrete den Første,” which was published in 1997 for the 600-year jubilee of the founding of the Nordic Union. I have referred to some of the most important discussions among Nordic historians, but basically the book presents an account based on historical and archaeological sources.

Finally I would like to thank all the people who have helped and inspired me, first and foremost my colleagues from the National Museum of Denmark and the University of Copenhagen. Since it would be impossible to mention everyone, I will confine myself to the English edition. Marcella Mulder from Brill Academic Publishing

has been very helpful, as has Alison Duncan, who has patiently smoothed over all the troubles with the translation.

For me, it is always a pleasure to talk of this fascinating woman and queen, and if the reader sometimes gets the feeling (as I do) that 600 years suddenly disappear and they are face to face with 'real' people, I have achieved my purpose.

## CHAPTER ONE

### DENMARK DURING THE REIGN OF VALDEMAR IV ATTERDAG

When King Valdemar died in the castle of Gurre on October 24th 1375, there was no successor to the Danish throne. Denmark was weakened after a war with the Hanseatic League and the country had barely recovered from almost total disintegration under the reign of his father Christoffer II. Nevertheless it was due to the impressive efforts of King Valdemar that Denmark still existed as a kingdom.

When he assumed power in 1340, the situation was so catastrophic that only a quarter of Jutland actually belonged to the Crown. The rest of the country was pawned to noblemen from Germany and Holstein, who in practice governed the fiefs by themselves. With tireless energy the young Valdemar began to redeem one fief after the other. At first it was a slow process, but with a rare combination of political flair, military skill and a large amount of luck, he succeeded in uniting the kingdom again over a period of twenty years.

His starting point was the northern area of Jutland, which was part of Queen Helvig's dowry (Plate 2). Open war against the hated mortgagees from Holstein began with the killing of Count Gerhard of Holstein on the night of March 31st 1340. The deed was done by a minor nobleman, Niels Ebbesen, and the rebellion spread quickly. King Valdemar brought his army to Zealand and in 1343 he gained control over Copenhagen and the castles of Søborg and Kalundborg. However it was not until 1348 that the king controlled the main part of the country.

Money for redemption and maintenance of the army was found partly through taxes and partly through the sale of Estonia, which had been conquered by Denmark in a crusade in 1219. For 10,000 German marks in silver the land was bought by the Teutonic Order, which controlled huge areas in Poland, Prussia and the Baltic. Thus the dream of a Danish empire in the Baltic was abandoned—all resources had to be concentrated on the reconstruction of the country.

Immediately after reunification of the Danish territories, a terrible disaster struck. The bubonic plague or 'Black Death' spread

quickly and ravaged Europe during the years 1348–1350. It appeared in two ways—if it attacked people in the lungs, they usually died in a couple of days from violent haemorrhaging. If it broke out as black or purple boils on the body, they had a 50% chance of survival. The Chronicle of Zealand relates that in 1348 the plague haunted the whole country, but we have no exact knowledge of the death rate. Some historians have estimated that perhaps a third of Europe's population died, but since very few casualty lists have been preserved, this judgment should be regarded with great caution. However there is no doubt that the Black Death had a terrible effect in Denmark. At a *Danehof*—a meeting of representatives from all classes of society—in 1354, it was decided that all death-sentences should be pardoned due to the great loss of population. Equally significant was an application to the pope from a Cistercian monk in Odense, Bartholomew Jensen, who asked to be transferred to the Benedictine Order as there were only a few monks left in the monastery of St. Canute.

Economic and agricultural crises followed in the wake of the plague. The price of land fell, as did the royal income from taxes, called *landgilde*. A large number of farms were abandoned and whole villages disappeared.

### *The childhood of Princess Margrete*

During these hard times Princess Margrete was born. The Chronicle of Zealand states: "In the year 1353 the queen gave birth to a daughter, and the baptismal service was performed by the honourable father Bishop Henrik in Roskilde, and she was called Margrete."<sup>1</sup> The exact date of her birth is unknown and there are no references to her early childhood. She was the youngest of six children born to King Valdemar and Queen Helvig, of whom only three survived to adulthood. Her brother Prince Christoffer was chosen to follow his father Valdemar onto the throne, while her older sister Ingeborg was married to Heinrich, a son of Albrecht II, Duke of Mecklenburg.

At the age of six Margrete was engaged to the 18-year-old King Haakon of Norway.<sup>2</sup> He was the youngest son of King Magnus

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<sup>1</sup> The birth of Margrete: *Chronica Sialandie. Annales Danici*, p. 176.

<sup>2</sup> The engagement between King Haakon and Margrete. 1359: S T. II, nr. 339.

Eriksson, who had ruled Sweden and Norway for forty years. In 1343 it had been decided to split the two united countries between the sons of Magnus Eriksson. Accordingly the eldest son Erik followed his father in Sweden, while Haakon took over the kingdom of Norway.

The marriage agreement was recorded in Copenhagen, but the document itself has not been preserved. No doubt it included a stipulation on the so-called 'morning gift' (*morgengave*), which defined the queen's marriage portion in the form of regular income and fiefs. According to tradition it was granted to the queen on the morning after the wedding. The treaty also included an agreement that the Danish King Valdemar would aid Magnus Eriksson in a newly-arisen conflict with his son Erik in Sweden. For a long time they had ruled the kingdom together, with King Magnus governing the northern part of Sweden, and his eldest son governing the southern part. This arrangement failed, and rival interests soon resulted in direct confrontation between father and son. An alliance with King Valdemar was a tempting opportunity for Magnus to regain control in Sweden.

Little Margrete was thus involved in power struggles from the age of six. Not everyone praised the engagement. The renowned Birgitta of Vadstena, who founded the Bridgettine Order, sent a letter to the pope calling it a game with dolls, "because worldly honour is sought hereby and not Christian law." She predicted that "from this marriage there will come troubles and no health to the kingdom (i.e. Sweden). Nor shall its seed become firmly rooted, and the inhabitants shall not rejoice over an heir."<sup>3</sup>

This prediction later proved to be quite accurate. The holy Birgitta (canonised in 1391) was never afraid to give her frank opinion, whether to popes, emperors or kings. In another letter she characterised the Danish king as a wolf and directly warned King Magnus against "this flattering, shrewd fowler, who blows his whistle to decoy the bird."

King Valdemar certainly had a definite purpose behind his daughter's marriage. His intention was to regain Scania, for this important part of the kingdom north of the Sound (Øresund) had been pawned to Sweden since 1332. Several chronicles mention that the marriage treaty stipulated the restoration of Helsingborg castle.

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<sup>3</sup> Translated from J. Skovgaard, 1921.

In June the Danish king brought a great army across the Sound and conquered Malmö and Helsingborg. Soon all of Scania was occupied, *pro forma* to support King Magnus. However on July 27th an incident occurred which completely changed the political scene. The young King Erik died suddenly and left his father King Magnus as the absolute ruler of all Sweden. In this new situation, all agreements between King Magnus and the Danish King Valdemar were renounced, including the marriage between Margrete and King Haakon of Norway.

### *The conquest of Gotland*

King Valdemar had no intention of giving up Scania, and launched a direct attack against Sweden. His target was the island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea, with its great and powerful city of Visby. The city belonged to the Hanseatic League and held a key position in the control of the Baltic. Trade routes from east and west met here, but until this period most of the rich revenues had filled the pockets of the German merchants.

Conquering the island of Öland on their way, the Danish fleet arrived in Gotland in July 1361. Troops were landed south of Visby, and on July 27th a great battle was fought outside the city walls. Here the trained and well-equipped army of King Valdemar met a miserable force of peasants. The German merchants did not intervene in the battle—they only wanted to secure their property and privileges. From the walls of Visby they witnessed the merciless slaughter of the Swedish peasants. About 1800 men and boys died on the battlefield and their corpses were thrown into mass graves. This had to be done quickly because of the danger of spreading disease in the hot summer. In the churchyard of a monastery just outside the walls, the citizens raised a memorial cross of stone with the inscription: “In the year of the Lord 1361 on Tuesday after St. Jacob’s day the Gothlanders who lie buried here fell outside the gates of Visby in battle against the Danes. Pray for them.”

In the 1920s the graves were found and excavated by Swedish archaeologists (Plate 3). It was a sensational discovery, not just because of the many details of 14thC arms and equipment which came to light, but also because of the large number of skeletons. These were an important source of information. About 22% of the dead in the



graves had been under the age of twenty; at least four were hunch-backed and many were lame. It is easy to imagine the cruel deaths dealt out by the Danish knights to this force of peasants. One had his legs cut off by a single sword stroke; others had their heads smashed by bludgeons or were killed by crossbow-bolts.<sup>4</sup>

After the battle the Danish army marched into Visby, where the German merchants paid for their privileges with "gold and silver, furs of different kinds and a huge amount of other treasures."

Valdemar Atterdag must have known that his campaign was an intolerable provocation to the Swedish king as well as the Hanseatic League, and that open war was the inevitable consequence. The Hanseatic League launched a trade blockade against Denmark, and allied itself with Sweden and the counts of Holstein for a mutual military campaign against the country.

The engagement between Margrete and Haakon had already been broken, and negotiations were now begun for a marriage between Haakon and Elisabeth, sister of the Count of Holstein. The knight Hermann de Vitzen and *magister* Eylard Schonevelt were sent to Holstein to conclude the agreement. When all the formalities had been settled, the legates escorted the queen-to-be from her father's house to the ships, which sailed for Sweden on December 17th. However misfortune struck on the journey when a storm blew Elisabeth's ship onto the Danish coast, where it was captured by the soldiers of Valdemar Atterdag. The unfortunate girl was taken to the Archbishop of Lund, who declared that the wedding would be a serious breach of the law, since Haakon had previously been engaged to Margrete. Accordingly the archbishop felt obliged to detain the bride-to-be "so that there should not be any action against God and the marriage." Elisabeth remained in custody, which doubtless aroused great indignation in Holstein.<sup>5</sup>

The planned campaign against Valdemar Atterdag failed. When a Hanseatic fleet of 25 great ships (cogs) as well as a number of smaller ships under the command of the mayor of Lübeck Johan Wittenberg launched a siege of Helsingborg castle, Danish troops managed to capture 12 of the cogs. Many important people were taken prisoner, and later released for the large ransom of 170,000

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<sup>4</sup> Published by B. Thordeman, 1939.

<sup>5</sup> Elisabeth of Holstein: Hermann Korners *Chronica Novella*, p. 277.

marks. The siege was raised and the remaining ships in the fleet returned to Lübeck, while the Danish army continued its successful campaign.

### *The wedding in 1363*

Luck seemed to follow King Valdemar. The Swedish King Magnus was forced to abandon the war, and an armistice was agreed with the Hanseatic League. Now a marriage between the 10-year-old Princess Margrete and King Haakon was relevant again, and on Sunday April 9th 1363 “the King of Norway Haakon was married to Margrete, daughter of Valdemar, King of Denmark, and a solemn wedding was celebrated in Copenhagen, where the Archbishop Nikolaus celebrated his first mass,” as recorded in the Annals of Scania.

Unfortunately we have no detailed description of the festivities, but no doubt Copenhagen was turned upside down for several days. Foreign princes, noblemen and delegates along with their servants were lodged partly in the castle and partly in the finer houses in the city. Between the abundant banquets the guests were entertained by jesters and chivalric games, and a tournament was probably part of the amusements. King Valdemar was well aware of the standard of festivities given at the finest courts in Europe and he wanted to impress his guests.

Soon after the wedding the imprisoned Elisabeth was returned to her family in Holstein, who were outraged by her humiliating treatment. It is unlikely that the child Margrete knew much about all this, and presumably her marriage with the 22-year-old King Haakon was not consummated until a couple of years later. In royal families marriage was regarded as a treaty, in which power, money and land were the main issues, and the ages of the bride and groom mattered little. Margrete probably remained with her parents for some time. However as queen of Norway and Sweden (after the death of his elder brother Erik, Haakon had become king of Sweden as well), it was necessary for Margrete to have a suitable upbringing and education. She was taken to the royal castle of Akershus in Norway, and a noblewoman was appointed as mistress of the household. This was Merete Ulvsdatter, married to Knut Algotsson and a daughter of the famous Birgitta of Vadstena. A chronicle from the

Vadstena convent records that Merete Ulvsdatter brought up Margrete with her own daughter Ingegerd and they “were often whipped with the same rod.”<sup>6</sup> No doubt the education focused on religion and all the things a queen should be acquainted with. In addition to reading and writing, Margrete would have studied the political and social relations of her time.

### *The loss of Sweden*

In 1364 there was a dramatic change in the balance of power in Scandinavia. The Swedish noblemen dethroned King Magnus and King Haakon following long-standing controversies and conflicts. During the Middle Ages the order of succession was not hereditary, and the kings of Denmark and Sweden were in principle elected by the populace. If a king failed to fulfill the promises and obligations which he had given on his coronation, the noblemen had the right to dethrone him.

The Swedes then turned to the Duke of Mecklenburg, Albrecht II, and offered the crown of Sweden to his son Albrecht III, the brother of Heinrich. The Mecklenburgs gladly accepted, and the Swedes paid homage to the young Albrecht on the ‘Stone of Mora’ outside Uppsala, according to the old traditions. The dethroned kings Magnus and Haakon tried desperately to retain their power, but in vain. Magnus was taken prisoner and Haakon fled to Norway.

Catastrophe then hit Denmark. King Valdemar’s only son Christoffer died in 1363 aged just 21. He was entombed with solemn ceremony in Roskilde cathedral, and his fine sepulchral monument can still be admired. The figure of the prince, in alabaster, is shown in full armour. On his left side lies a long sword and at his right side he holds a bullock knife. A large horned helmet is placed beside his head. It is a fitting memorial for a prince (Fig. 2).

It must have grieved Margrete to lose her older brother only a few months after her wedding to Haakon. But the burning question of the succession to the throne remained unresolved. King Valdemar postponed his decision, and in the autumn of 1363 he left for Krakow in order to attend the wedding of the German Emperor Karl IV.

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<sup>6</sup> The upbringing of the young queen: S.R.S., III, 2, p. 210.

His journey continued to Prague and further on to Avignon, where he persuaded Pope Urban V to condemn the acts of the Hanseatic League during the war. At the end of August 1364 he returned to Denmark and took over the government with renewed energy.

*The war against the Hanseatic League*

But Denmark's enemies were gathering. Delegates from the Hanseatic towns met in Cologne in November 1367 and agreed to form a confederation against Denmark. Soon Holstein and Mecklenburg joined, and by the time war broke out at the beginning of 1368, Sweden had joined as well. Valdemar Atterdag entrusted the government to the *drost* (the king's official substitute) Henning Podebusk and travelled to Germany to raise support, troops and money. However his efforts were unsuccessful. The fortress of Copenhagen was forced to surrender after several weeks of bombardment, and the whole castle was pulled to the ground by 47 stonemasons who came from Lübeck, Rostock and other Hanseatic towns. The royal castles of Elsinore, Falsterbo, Skanør, Nykøbing and Ålholm surrendered as well, and the prospects for Denmark's survival grew even worse when rebellious nobles from Jutland under the command of Claus Limbek joined the enemy.

Negotiations for peace were conducted by Henning Podebusk, and it was presumably due to his great political skill that Denmark was not forced to give up territory—although this was only narrowly avoided. The Treaty of Stralsund was agreed on May 24th 1370 and the conditions were severe.<sup>7</sup> The castles of Helsingborg, Malmö, Skanør and Falsterbo with the districts they administered in Scania as well as four towns were to be handed over to the Hanseatic League for a period of 15 years as war reparation. In addition the League were to have two thirds of the income from the annual herring market in Skanør and Falsterbo, which was one of the largest trade markets in northern Europe. The king had to be content with only one third. German privileges in Denmark secured free trade for the Hanseatic merchants. They could only be sentenced according to their own laws, except in cases of life and death. In case of ship-

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<sup>7</sup> The Treaty of Stralsund May 24th 1370: Dipl.D. 3 rk. vol. VIII, nr. 449.

wreck they were to have all the salvaged goods back—a point which had been argued for a long time. The final and most humiliating stipulation was that if King Valdemar entrusted the kingdom to a deputy or chose a successor, he required the consent of the Hanseatic League.

The Treaty of Stralsund constitutes the high point of Hanseatic influence in Scandinavia. Nevertheless it is surprising that the victorious confederation was satisfied with this. There was no division of Danish territory, which the dukes of Mecklenburg in particular had hoped for. Instead the peace treaty was dictated exclusively by the League's ambitions for a trade monopoly. If Mecklenburg and Sweden gained control over the eastern part of Denmark, this would be almost impossible to maintain. Therefore the League chose—probably eagerly supported by Henning Podebusk—to secure Denmark as an independent kingdom. The old Duke of Mecklenburg, Albrecht II, who had been characterised by the holy Birgitta as a fox, was now tricked himself.

Valdemar Atterdag confirmed the Treaty of Stralsund on October 27th 1371, and three days later he concluded a separate peace treaty with the old duke, who managed to persuade Valdemar to recognise the succession. The king promised that “if We resign or die without a male heir. . . . then nobody shall gain the kingdom of Denmark and hold it as a king with all royal rights except the son of Duke Heinrich and Our eldest daughter Ingeborg.”<sup>8</sup> In return the duke promised to hand over all the conquered castles and areas which he held.

It is uncertain why King Valdemar concluded such a treaty, which on some points directly contradicted the Treaty of Stralsund. Presumably the aristocratic council of state in Denmark, *Rigsrådet*, never ratified it. Nevertheless it must be considered a triumph for the old Duke of Mecklenburg, Albrecht II. Now one of his sons, Albrecht III, was king in Sweden and a grandchild with the same name (Albrecht IV) waited for the Danish throne.

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<sup>8</sup> The peace with Mecklenburg 30/10 1371: Dipl.D. 3 rk. vol. IX nr. 131.

*The letter to Haakon*

From Akershus castle in Norway Queen Margrete must have followed this course of events with great interest. She herself was a pawn in the political struggles for power, and no doubt she had been aware of this from her earliest childhood. Astonishingly a letter has been preserved (Fig. 3), which she wrote to her husband King Haakon on October 18th 1370(?), when she was only 17 years old.<sup>9</sup> The letter starts with a brief formula, in which she announces that she is well and hopes the same for “her dearest husband.” Then she goes directly to the point: “You shall know, my dear Lord, that I and my servants suffer great need for food and drink, so that neither they nor I get what we want. And therefore We ask You, my dear Lord, that You will find a way to improve the situation in order to prevent them from leaving me because of hunger. And We ask You, that You write to Westfal (a German merchant), so that he shall lend me all I will ask and require of him, and tell him, that You will pay him the goods he lends me.”

It gives a sad impression of the conditions in Akershus. Even though Norway at the end of the 14thC was an impoverished kingdom, to find such need at the royal castle is unexpected. It must have been humiliating for the queen to ask a German merchant for help.

The letter continues to discuss various matters, and Margrete informs the king of the arrangements she has made. A certain Bartholomew Goldsmith had sent a letter in which “he asks me to excuse him, because he failed to meet You, as he had been told. If he had gone to You, he would have missed the ship with all the goods he had to pay in Flanders. He asks me to say, that with the help of God he plans to return before winter, and what he brings with him at that time, You can use as much as You please.” Margrete asks Haakon not to be hard on him “for God’s sake and my prayer.” She finishes the letter with “God be with You, my dear Lord. Written at Akershus on Lucas the evangelist’s day (October 18th).” Below she adds an interesting remark, asking him among other things to pardon a criminal: “And I have promised Mr. Henry, that I will

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<sup>9</sup> Margrete’s letter to King Haakon Oct. 18th 1370: Dipl.N. I. nr. 409.

write to You, so that You will do it for my sake and not exile Ketil of Hofflandom and his companion.”

The letter gives us our first impression of Queen Margrete's character. Although she was only 17, her authoritative and energetic conduct is clear, and no doubt she already had great influence on the older but weaker King Haakon.

At Christmas 1370 she bore a son, who was to be the only child of the marriage. He was named after the canonised Norwegian King Olav (in Danish Oluf), killed in the battle of Stiklastad in 1030. Worship of the holy king had spread quickly, and great miracles were said to occur at his tomb in Nidaros cathedral in Trondheim. His popularity among the countless saints and martyrs was not least due to the royal house, which wanted to support its own *renommé*. In addition, a lot of money was amassed from the many pilgrims who came to visit the saint's tomb, so it was no coincidence that Margrete and Haakon chose the name for their son.

The economic situation of the royal house was desperate at this period. King Haakon had to pawn his gold crown with precious stones, a gold buckle of his mother's, and a gold belt mounted with precious stones to two merchants from Stralsund.<sup>10</sup> He was able to redeem the crown jewels in 1372, but presumably the Norwegian king did not command much respect from the rich German merchants. This picture would soon change.

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<sup>10</sup> King Haakon pawns his crown: Dipl.D. 3 rk. vol. IX. nr. 236.

## CHAPTER TWO

### THE STRUGGLE FOR THE CROWN OF DENMARK

After the death of Valdemar Atterdag in 1375, everything seemed to point to the House of Mecklenburg as the next rulers of Denmark. The king's only son Christoffer had died in 1363, so the most suitable heir to the throne seemed to be the son of the king's eldest daughter Ingeborg. She had married Heinrich, Duke of Mecklenburg, and their 10-year-old son Albrecht IV was therefore the next in line. In addition, King Valdemar had sealed a treaty with Mecklenburg in which he recognised the boy as his heir.

However this treaty had never been confirmed by the Danish council of state, who felt obliged to fulfil the Treaty of Stralsund. If the 5-year-old son of Norway's Queen Margrete was to have any chance of gaining the Danish throne, prompt action was necessary. Margrete knew that she had to buy friends among the council of state and the powerful Church. By December 24rd 1375, the *drost* Henning Podebusk had been entrusted with the castle of Holbæk and the district (*herred*) of Merløse on Zealand, for the sum of only 400 marks.<sup>1</sup> In return he recognised Margrete as Queen of Denmark, Norway and Sweden. At the same time she settled a feud with the Bishop of Roskilde, granting him the castle of Nebbe and pawning two large districts and three quarters of the city of Roskilde.<sup>2</sup>

The House of Mecklenburg was fully aware of the power struggle, and the 10-year-old Albrecht already referred to himself as *kon- ing der Denen* (King of the Danes). They had a powerful friend in the German Emperor Karl IV, who on November 6th 1375 urged the noblemen and the Church of Denmark to elect Albrecht, since King Valdemar had died without '*legitima masculini sexus*' as heir to the

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<sup>1</sup> Henning Podebusk receives Holbæk castle etc. Dec. 24rd 1375: Dipl.D. 3 rk. vol. IX, nr. 546.

<sup>2</sup> The Bishop of Roskilde receives Nebbe castle etc. Dec. 7th 1375: Dipl.D. 3 rk. vol. IX, nr. 541.



throne.<sup>3</sup> Presumably his solemn letter went largely unnoticed in Denmark—it was much more alarming that several noblemen from Holstein joined the Mecklenburg party. In his new thesis Anders Bøgh underlines, that the House of Mecklenburg presumably controlled the great island of Lolland, and the commander of the royal castle in the city of Ribe in Jutland was an adherent of the Mecklenburgers as well.<sup>4</sup>

The race for the Danish throne was dependent on relations with the Hanseatic League, whose main interest lay in protecting the rights they had obtained through the Treaty of Stralsund. They reasoned that if the House of Mecklenburg controlled both Sweden and Denmark, Hanseatic trade privileges could be at risk. Queen Margrete was aware of these worries among the League members, and knew how to secure their support. In the beginning of 1376, Henning Podebusk and Anders Jepsen Lunge handed over a proposal on behalf of Queen Margrete for a peace treaty between her husband Haakon and the Hanseatic League.<sup>5</sup> This proposal aroused great surprise, “because it seemed to them they were very important matters to entrust to the Lady.” Margrete was then only 23 years old, and although she acted in concert with King Haakon and Henning Podebusk, she already appears a surprisingly mature woman.

Gradually the general sentiment swung in favour of Oluf, and in his election propaganda his supporters no doubt played on anti-German feeling in the kingdom. The decision to elect him was finally taken in March 1376, following lengthy negotiations between different parts of the country. On March 3rd the districts east of the Sound (Skåne, Halland and Blekinge) joined the Jutlanders and elected “Oluf, the almighty son of King Haakon, as our lord and king.” In return they demanded, that he confirmed their rights “according to the law books and a coronation charter.”<sup>6</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> The German Emperor Karl IV urges the Danish nobility to choose Albrecht: Dipl.D. 3 rk. vol. IX, nr. 531.

<sup>4</sup> Bøgh, A. 2003, p. 343.

<sup>5</sup> Henning Podebusk and others (on Queen Margrete's behalf) propose peace between Norway and the Hanseatic League Referred in a letter of February 3rd: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. I. nr. 14.

<sup>6</sup> Scania, Halland and Blekinge; Letter of March 3rd 1376: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 1. nr. 18.

*The coronation charter*

However it was not until May 3rd that the election was confirmed at the *Danehof* in Slagelse, where all the noblemen and the magnates of the church had assembled. Here the great coronation charter was sealed, containing all the conditions for the king's rule.<sup>7</sup> Due to Oluf's infancy it was decided to entrust the regency to Queen Margrete and King Haakon.

The coronation charter in Latin has no less than 34 articles, which reveal a lot about medieval society in Denmark. Since the Catholic Church ranked first in the social hierarchy, the first nine articles deal with the privileges of the Church. As the most important point, the king confirmed the Church's ancient rights and stressed that it should be "free and exempt" from all royal taxes. It was emphasized that neither the king nor his officials could claim rights to the Church tithe, the tax which each parish or farm had to pay in kind or money once a year. Additionally the Church was to possess and administer all its properties, monasteries and farms without any interference, and a cleric could only be judged in an ecclesiastical court of law.

The rights and privileges of the nobility followed a few articles later. Here it was stressed that the king could not start a war without the consent of the Church and the members of the council of state. The nobility (who were exempt from taxes in the same way as the Church) were allowed to receive fines of 3 and 9 marks as income. If a nobleman was captured in war the king was obliged to pay the ransom within a year.

The coronation charter also benefited the peasantry, as the king promised not to levy new taxes and duties. Nobody was allowed to take property from a peasant, and if a peasant wanted to leave his farm, he was free to do so.

Judicially, it was emphasized that nobody could be detained without a proper trial in court, and "no man—of whatever status or rank—should oppress or threaten someone lesser than himself, whether he is a clergyman or a secular." It was stated that each year a *Danehof* meeting should be held on John the Baptist's Day (June

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<sup>7</sup> Oluf's coronation charter: Den danske rigsløvgivning indtil år 1400, pp. 276–318. Ed. E. Kroman.

24th) at the royal castle in Nyborg, as had been the tradition from ancient times. Merchants and citizens were exempt from new taxes and customs duties. It was also stressed that if someone suffered an injustice from the king or his officials and brought the case to court, he should not be exposed to revenge or hatred because of it.

The 34 articles—of which only a few have been mentioned here—were sanctioned and sealed by the mightiest men in the realm, with the Archbishop of Lund at their head. When compared with the coronation charters of former kings, it seems rather mild. First and foremost law and order had to be secured in order to rebuild the country.

With the coronation the first victory was gained, but the situation was still very unstable. The House of Mecklenburg refused to recognize the election and the German emperor declared openly that he would help them to conquer Denmark. In September the old Duke of Mecklenburg, Albrecht II, sailed to Zealand with a large army, but apparently there were no armed encounters. By September 21st a general agreement had been reached which recognized the right to free elections in Denmark. In return, a court of arbitration was appointed to fix the rights and demands of Albrecht IV of Mecklenburg after the death of his other grandfather King Valdemar Atterdag. However the vague formulation of the treaty makes it very uncertain what actually happened in Copenhagen during the autumn of 1376. It seems that the old duke did not give up his claims to the Danish throne on behalf of his grandson, and his claim to half the kingdom as compensation was unacceptable to the Danish council of state.

At the *Danehof* meeting in Nyborg in 1377, the most powerful men of the realm agreed on a “king’s peace,” and all promised “on our faith and honour always to keep and firmly obey all rights, laws, privileges and courteous behaviour” which were established by King Valdemar and his predecessors.<sup>8</sup> It was also stated that “if any cleric or secular should be exposed unjustly to the laws of the country through oppression or force from anyone, whoever he might be” then all were obliged “with no hesitation or objection” to give their life and possessions to help them, if this was demanded by the *drost*

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<sup>8</sup> The Danehof in Nyborg June 22nd–July 1st 1377: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. I nv. 257 and: Den danske rigsglovgivning indtil år 1400, pp. 318–329. Ed. E. Kroman.

or the royal marshal. This was clearly a promise of support for King Oluf in case of internal rebellion. The archbishop was at the meeting, as were the bishops of the kingdom, 44 knights and 88 esquires, who all supported the regency of Queen Margrete.

Perhaps it is misleading to speak of “the regency of Queen Margrete” at this early stage. She was only 24, and although she had shown exceptional political skill, she had no real experience. As a woman—even with the influence of a queen—it was difficult for her political talent to be recognized. No doubt the government was initially managed by the *drost* Henning Podebusk and the royal marshal Evert Moltke. Tue Galen, the royal official in Scania, also had great influence in the council of state.

Surprisingly King Haakon is almost absent from the historical scene at this time when it might be expected he would strongly support his son’s bid for the Danish throne. It seems he suffered a serious illness and in 1380 he died, aged only 40. Now Margrete held the regency alone, but although it was a great responsibility, she was free of a dangerous enemy. The old duke, Albrecht II, had died in February 1379, and the driving force behind the House of Mecklenburg’s claims to the Danish throne had thus gone. Work on the reconstruction of Denmark could begin.

## CHAPTER THREE

### SOCIETY, CLASS AND GOVERNMENT

Denmark's appearance during the late Middle Ages was quite different from today. The kingdom was much larger and included the fertile landscapes of Scania, Halland and Blekinge east of the Sound, which now constitute the southern part of Sweden. The archbishop of Denmark lived here in the large city of Lund, whose imposing medieval cathedral is still preserved. The population probably stood at around one million, although this is speculation. As previously mentioned, we have no exact knowledge of the mortality rate during the Black Death, but there is no doubt that the population was seriously reduced.

The average lifespan was probably about 40 years, but the high death rate among children seriously affects this estimate. Presumably if one survived early childhood, living to be older than 40 was common. The old *drost* Henning Podebusk was 70 when he died, and the death of Queen Margrete at the age of about 60 is probably due to the fact that she was infected by a local epidemic in Flensburg. The average height seems to have been about 1.70m for men and about 1.60m for women—a little shorter than today. The estimate is based on skeletons from medieval graves, so the traditional perception that people in the Middle Ages were generally short and underfed is false. King Valdemar Atterdag, the father of Queen Margrete, was a strongly-built man of 1.83m.

Most of the population lived as farmers. This has been calculated at more than 90%, spread across about 80,000 farms. Only about one eighth of these farms were owned by the peasants themselves. The rest were divided as follows: for each one belonging to the king, three belonged to the Church and three to the nobility.<sup>1</sup> It would therefore be wrong to speak of a free peasantry, even though their dependence on the landowners did not have the same humiliating aspects we associate with the 16th and 17th centuries.

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<sup>1</sup> According to new investigations by Carsten Porskrog Rasmussen in "Kronens gods", 1994.

During the 14thC Denmark was a strictly hierarchical society. Roughly speaking it consisted of the clergy, the noblemen, the townsmen and the farmers and—with the exception of the clergy—people nearly always stayed in the social class in which they were born. However social mobility was not an unknown phenomenon, and during the agricultural crises many peasants moved to the towns in an attempt to create a new future for their families. The Church offered a chance for an intelligent man with ambition to pursue an international career, although he had to abstain from having a wife and children (at least officially).

In the Middle Ages the Catholic Church influenced every level of society, and it was not only spiritual power it represented. Large areas of Denmark were owned by the Church, and the properties of the bishops, monasteries and churches were tax-exempt. Sometimes the monks in the great monasteries in the countryside cultivated the fields themselves, while others had copyholders (*fæstebønder*) to do the hard work. The monasteries also functioned as hospitals for the many lepers, and in the towns they often served as cultural centres. Science, music and education all fell under the remit of the Catholic Church, and the bishops, with the Archbishop of Lund at their head, had great influence on political decisions. The main source of income was the church tithe (*kirketiende*), which had to be paid each year by every parish or farm. Often the tax was paid in kind, i.e. in grain, and the income was divided into three portions between the bishop, the local priest and the parish church. Other sources of income were the donations and memorial masses which were intended to secure the donor's soul a place in Heaven.

It could almost be said that the Catholic Church functioned as an independent state within the kingdom, since in principle the clergy were obliged to obey only the pope. St. Peter's successor administered the keys to the Kingdom of Heaven and was therefore superior to the kings and emperors of the secular world. In the early Middle Ages this had caused endless struggles between Crown and Church, but in the 14thC a papal excommunication could no longer shake the world. Generally speaking the Church formed an integral part of society, and Queen Margrete was clever enough to make the most of a good relationship. The Bishop of Roskilde, Peder Jensen Lodehat, became one of her closest advisers and this promoted further cooperation. In return the queen was very generous with donations of property and money.

The aristocracy was also exempt from taxes, but on condition that the noblemen swore obedience to the king. In war they were obliged to serve the king with a certain number of armed men. Scattered around the country were a great number of castles, which in some cases were quite humble wooden buildings. Attached to the castle was land with copyhold farms, where the peasants cultivated the fields at their own expense and paid an annual tax called *landgilde* to the landlord. In addition they often had to work at the castle. In Jutland and Funen many of the castles belonged to the aristocracy, whereas in Zealand, Lolland and Falster the greater part of the land belonged to the crown. Many ramparts and ruins from these castles remain today, but only a few have been excavated.

The greatest castles in the kingdom, such as Vordingborg, Kalundborg, Nyborg, Helsingborg and Kalø belonged to the Crown. These castles were very large, with many buildings surrounded by curtain walls with towers and moats. The Church also possessed several castles (the mighty Hammershus on the island of Bornholm (Plate 6) was owned by the Archbishop of Lund) and fine examples such as Gjorslev and Dragsholm are still preserved.

### *The vassals and the feudal nobility*

The intermediaries between the king's government and the general population were the fiefholders or vassals. Denmark was divided into fiefs or *len*, which could be of very different sizes. The most important fiefs had a royal castle, but one man could be vassal of several castles at the same time.

As an official representative of the king the vassal had several important tasks. First and foremost he had to govern the fief on behalf of the king and receive all taxes and duties. In addition he was responsible for maintaining law and order, and in war the vassal and his soldiers were an important part of the armed forces. There was tough competition between the noblemen to get the best fiefs, and conditions for obtaining them could vary widely. In general there were four types:

1. A fief of account required the vassal to present annual accounts for all income and expenses. The surplus went directly to the crown, but often the vassal was granted a certain sum of money.

2. A fief of rent required the vassal to pay an annual sum of money to the crown. In return he possessed the fief with all its incomes.
3. A fief of duty was the most advantageous. In this case the vassal was only obliged to fulfil his duties as a representative of the king. He had to pay all expenses, but in return he received the income from the fief.
4. A fief of pawn functioned as mortgage for a large sum of money. This allowed rich noblemen who had lent money to the crown to gain control of parts of the country. The danger inherent in this situation was well known. During the reign of Christoffer the Second at the beginning of the 14thC, most of Denmark was pawned to noblemen from Germany and Holstein.

The race for the best and most important fiefs was therefore often won by the richest noblemen, who were members of the council of state. In 1376 we find Erik Nielsen Saltensee as vassal of the royal castles of Søborg and Skanderborg, and in 1406 Magnus von Alen is mentioned as vassal of the castles of Lindholm, Skanør and Falsterbo, where the income must have been considerable.

The old Danish noble families such as Bugge, Galt, Abildgaard and Juel lost some of their influence during the 14thC, when noblemen from northern Germany began to immigrate into Denmark. Even the *drost* Henning Podebusk came from a noble family in Rügen, and there seems to have been a tendency to prefer foreign noblemen as employees in the royal administration. Perhaps queen Margrete expected a higher degree of loyalty from people who were totally dependent on her favour. However the continuous struggle for power between the crown and the aristocracy was not as pronounced during the last part of the 14thC.

A nobleman's rank and status depended upon the fame and wealth of his family as well as his personal achievements. It was of great importance to receive the accolade of knighthood. Chivalrous ideals mixed with Christian mysticism had great influence at all levels of society, and this was reflected in the art, literature and philosophy of the time.

### *The increasing importance of the towns*

The towns played a major role in the kingdom's development. The seven largest and most important were also episcopal residences:



Lund, Roskilde, Odense, Viborg, Aarhus, Ribe and Slesvig. To these must be added the towns of Copenhagen, Aalborg and Malmö, which thanks to trade expanded considerably during this period. However the number of inhabitants was small compared with great towns and cities abroad. The city of Venice ranked among the biggest of its day with about 90,000 inhabitants, and Bruges in Flanders was also very populous. These towns were the most important trading centres in Europe; a major Hanseatic town such as Lübeck probably had only around 20,000 inhabitants. In Denmark the biggest towns had barely half this number.

A combination of three elements was vital for the dynamics of a town. They were partly ecclesiastical centres, and partly a focus for trade and craftsmanship. They also housed an expanding administration. All the larger provincial towns had their own municipal charter and city court, whose provisions and regulations could vary considerably from the general laws. The town government consisted of two mayors and a town council. A crown representative collected taxes, customs and fines, which belonged to the king. Other officials were the town notary, a messenger and the city treasurer, while night watchmen were responsible for maintaining law and order.

The craftsmen's guilds were corporations of high social standing. They were not only commercial associations with a monopoly of their craft, but formed almost independent communities with their own written laws, which among other things stipulated economic support for the sick, widows or injured guild brethren. They also levied fines for playing dice or not attending a funeral. The guild was consecrated to a saint, i.e. St. Eleggus, protector of the goldsmiths, who still use his picture as a symbol.

Most of the larger towns had fortifications, consisting of curtain walls or palisades, which only allowed entrance through the city gates. Houses were mostly half-timbered, and only a few buildings such as the churches, the city hall, the monasteries and some private houses were built of bricks. The streets were only rarely paved and must have been very muddy in rainy weather. At night it would have been very dark, as there were no street lamps. Cows, pigs and hens were part of urban life, and public sanitation was very poor.

*The government*

Following this rough sketch of Denmark around 1375 we shall look at the administration and government. Who filled the most powerful posts when queen Margrete began her rule? Most important was the *drost* Henning Podebusk, who had great influence in the government.<sup>2</sup> During the 14thC the *drost* was first among the officials of the kingdom and assumed leadership of the country in the absence of the king or queen. He could employ and dismiss officials and pass sentences in the king's name, and he was also responsible for the crown's finances. Thus the *drost* occupied a very trusted role, and could threaten the king's position if he abused his power. However in Denmark Henning Podebusk gave tremendous support to the young queen, and retained his position for 12 years until his death in 1387. Thereafter no one was appointed as his successor; presumably queen Margrete either feared an abuse of power or wanted to secure it in her own hands.

The *gælker* in Scania was another powerful man, whose authority was similar in a certain degree to the *drost*, although limited to Scania. A contemporary document from the council of state defines his functions very precisely: "He shall rule Scania in the name of the king, employ and dismiss vassals, collect taxes and decide everything in Scania as if the king was there, but he shall give accounts to the *drost* and act according to his advice." In judicial cases his decisions could be appealed to the *drost*.

When queen Margrete assumed power, Tue Galen was *gælker* in Scania. He was one of the first to support the election of the little Oluf, but at the beginning of the 1380s he allied himself with the House of Mecklenburg. Queen Margrete dismissed him immediately, and did not appoint anyone as his successor.

The *marsk* commanded the royal army, but was subordinate to the *drost*. From 1376 Evert Moltke was *marsk*, keeping his position until his death in 1380. From that time the post remained vacant, and the queen preferred to employ various commanders, usually foreigners experienced in warfare.

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<sup>2</sup> In 1385 or 1386 the royal council issued a two-part document in which the official posts of the realm were described and several questions on the status of the peasantry were answered. Published in: Den danske rigslovg. indtil år 1400, pp. 330–334. Ed. E. Kroman.

Another high-ranking official was the *hofmester*, but during queen Margrete's reign this was not a post of major political importance. His main task was to direct the court household, and it must have been a difficult duty when the queen and a large number of her servants spent most of the year travelling between different royal castles. It was not until the last part of the 15thC that Copenhagen became the crown's residence, and thus the capital of the country.

Finally the *kansler* (chancellor) should be mentioned. This official was responsible for the royal chancellery, which dispatched all the king's official documents. At the same time he was responsible for the royal seals and thus a man trusted by the king. It seems the post was connected to the bishopric of Roskilde, since bishop Niels Ulfeldt is mentioned in 1376 as the chancellor of the kingdom, and his successor Peder Jensen Lodehat became queen Margrete's most trusted adviser.

The council of state consisted of men from the highest-ranking clergy and aristocracy and constituted the highest authority next to the king. Although members were appointed by the king and had to swear an oath of obedience, they had the right to control the king or queen's decisions. If the council of state felt the king was not fulfilling his duties, they were fully within their rights to depose him and choose another ruler. Denmark was a 'free country of election,' and it was not a matter of course that the crown was hereditary within the royal family, although there was a tradition of this. Given this background it is obvious that the relationship between the king and the aristocracy could develop into a serious power struggle. However Valdemar the Fourth "Atterdag" had strengthened the crown's position and this development continued during the reign of his daughter queen Margrete.

In practice the council of state represented all the inhabitants of the kingdom by this time, as the importance of the old provincial parliaments called *Landsting* had gradually declined. In Denmark there were five provincial parliaments, one for each part of the country. They were the only political assemblies in which peasants and citizens were allowed to participate, but they now functioned primarily as courts of law. However when a new king was elected he had to have his election confirmed by all five provincial parliaments. The *Danehofs* were the general assemblies reserved for the aristocracy, which were usually held at the royal castle of Nyborg in Funen. They exercised the highest legislative power, and all new laws had

to be approved by them. They also acted as the final court of appeal.

Thus Denmark was a highly-developed country whose government, administration and legislation were firmly established when queen Margrete came to the throne.

### *The international situation*

The political map of Europe in the 14thC was quite different from today. In spite of its size the mighty German empire was politically weak, due to its division into countless electorates, duchies and counties which were involved in endless internal struggles. After the death of the emperor Karl IV in 1378 his son Wenzel took over the imperial crown, but in contrast to his father he proved to be a weak regent and was at last deposed by the electors of the empire.

Since 1337 France had been at war with England. The so-called Hundred Years' War was a result of the English crown's dynastic claim to major areas of French territory, and after many years of war large parts of the country were plundered and impoverished. When king Charles VI came to power in 1380 France had rebuilt its strength after the disastrous defeat of Poitiers in 1356. However it soon became clear that the king's attacks of madness would become permanent. The government was taken over by his uncles, but the kingdom was threatened by serious internal unrest when oppressed peasants joined the citizens in armed rebellion against the harsh feudal system. However the revolt was crushed ruthlessly and the insane Charles VI remained on the throne as a political puppet until his death in 1422.

The situation in England was also characterized by powerful social and religious movements. During a rebellion in 1381 the peasants forced their way to the Tower of London and killed the archbishop of Canterbury. The young king Richard II prevented a catastrophe by promising to fulfil their demands, but this was later rejected by the parliament.

The rebellion had been strongly influenced by the religious movement led by John Wycliffe. He urged a total break with the papacy, arguing that Catholic belief was simple idolatry, and the Bible should be the only authority. The worship of saints, pilgrimages, indulgences and requiems were all rejected. He also believed priests should be allowed to marry. His views were later adopted by Martin Luther,

but Wycliffe's own movement was condemned officially and faded out after his death in 1384.

Spain as it is now did not exist during the Middle Ages. The Iberian peninsula was divided into four states: Castile, Aragon and Portugal, which were Christian, and the Moslem kingdom of Granada. Previously the Moors had ruled almost the entire peninsula, but had since been forced to withdraw to the south. However Denmark had no significant political or economic contact with these states.

One of the powers which had great influence on the Nordic countries was the Teutonic Order, which governed widespread areas of Poland, Prussia, and the Baltic. This clerical order of chivalry was organised as a strange combination of spiritual and secular elements. It had been established originally to fight and convert heathens in the Holy Land and to administer hospitals. However in 1226 the order was transferred to east Prussia, where the knights founded a powerful state which soon expanded. A large part of the population was killed or reduced to slavery, to be replaced by a flow of German immigrants. The order was led by a grand master, who lived in Marienburg, south of Danzig. He delegated his power, military-style, to the knights who held numerous strong castles for the order.

Rich and powerful cities were founded along the coast, of which the most important were Danzig, Königsberg, Riga, Reval and Dorpat. They joined the Hanseatic League, but it was not long before a clash of interests occurred with the Teutonic Order.

## CHAPTER FOUR

### PIRATES AND COMMERCIAL WAR AGAINST THE HANSEATIC LEAGUE

The Hanseatic League was a multinational federation of the independent, primarily German cities, which had emerged as some of the most powerful European trading centres during the high Middle Ages. The League spread its web of trade routes across northern and central Europe, mainly by sea and via the main rivers. In the Middle Ages transport by sea was a quick, easy and safe method of travelling compared to the poor roads on land.

In time the Hanseatic League strengthened its position to the degree that it almost had a trade monopoly. The Nordic merchants faced fierce competition, particularly in the Baltic Sea. The important settlement of Visby on Gotland was a German Hanseatic town, where merchants from Novgorod and Riga took in provisions and sold their articles on their journey south. The cargo in the big cogs was mainly timber, wax and fur from Russia, which was exported to western Europe. The merchants could buy cloth from the Netherlands, fish, corn and butter from Denmark, wine and olives from southern Europe, iron and copper from Sweden and beer, salt and glassware from Germany. In addition there were fine manmade products from France, Burgundy and Italy as well as expensive spices from the Orient, which were imported to Europe via Venice and Genoa.

Visby was an impressive town, protected by a 3.5km curtain wall with no less than 48 towers, most of which are still almost intact (Plate 13). Many trading companies had their own place of worship, and Visby had a total of eighteen churches. Stockholm was another trading centre for the League, which took part in the town's government as well.

In Norway the Hanseatic League had one of its most important 'colonies' in Bergen. Today the *Tyskebryggen* (the German quay) still exists as a traditional district with tall wooden warehouses which give a good impression of the town's appearance in the Middle Ages. Bergen was the centre of the Norwegian economy, which was founded

primarily on the export of cod and other fish. However it is likely that most of the profits filled the purses of the German merchants who dominated economic life and controlled the vital corn imports. Archaeological excavations have been carried out continuously on the *Tyskebryggen* from 1955 until today, with excellent results. Quays, streets and houses preserved up to a height of about 2m have been revealed, along with many different items such as tools, shoes, combs and pottery.<sup>1</sup> The finds also included gold rings and ornaments, which the owners were no doubt very annoyed to lose.

In the Baltic, the Hanseatic town of Lübeck was the strongest town in the League by virtue of its role at the hub of the trade routes between Novgorod, Lübeck, Hamburg and Bruges. The League owed its success to several factors, one of the most important of which was its organisation. While a Nordic merchant usually acted as captain on his own ship, the German Hanseatic merchant managed his affairs from his home town, i.e. Lübeck, often in partnership with other merchants. By running their business jointly they could afford to have several ships at sea at the same time. For practical reasons, the purchase and sale of goods abroad was often handed over to agents located in larger towns such as London, Bruges and Antwerp, where German offices were established. The spice trade was an important part of the business in these places, and the foreigners were often called 'Peppermen.' The Hanseatic League forbade their employees to marry local girls, so the term 'Pepperman' became synonymous with a bachelor. The word is still used in modern Nordic vocabulary.

### *The tall ships of the Hanseatic League*

Another important factor in the League's success was the development of a new type of ship, called a cog. The old longships were not fit for heavy cargo, since they could only charter loads of 20–25 tons. The cog, which was much larger, could charter about 200 tons, and even though it was not as fast under sail, it soon ousted the old-fashioned types of ship. During Queen Margrete's reign cogs

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<sup>1</sup> Published by Asbjørn E. Herteig: The buildings at Bryggen. Their Topographical and Chronological Development. In: "The Bryggen Papers" Part I 1990, Part II 1991.

dominated seafaring in the Baltic Sea. They were built with a straight bow and a flat carvel-built bottom, while the sides were clinker-built. The rudder was placed under a tall stern castle, and the ship was able to take quite heavy sails. Often both ship and crew were armed because of the many pirates on the Nordic seas.

In 1962 the wreck of a very well-preserved cog was found in Bremen harbour.<sup>2</sup> It was raised and revealed as an almost completed ship of oak with a length of 23.5m. The breadth at the middle of the ship was 7m, and at this point the height was 7.5m. It could have chartered a cargo of around 130 tons, so it was reasonably large. It probably sank shortly before 1400, and the reason the mast and stern castle had not been erected was that it sank immediately after coming off the slipway. It would have been a great economic loss to the owner. Today the cog is exhibited in a special building in the Bremerhaven maritime museum, which allows visitors to get a realistic impression of the Hanseatic ships.

Shipwrecks have also been found in Denmark from the time of Queen Margrete. The best-known example is the cog which was found by a 16-year-old schoolboy in 1976, near the beach of Vejby in the northern part of Zealand.<sup>3</sup> One hundred and ten gold coins were found in the wreck, of which 74 were English nobles, 30 were half-nobles and 5 were quarter-nobles, all struck under the English King Edward III, who reigned from 1327–77. Finally there was a single gold coin from Lübeck. The Vejby treasure is the second largest from medieval Denmark—in the Middle Ages this fortune could have been exchanged for about 450 cows. Based on the coins, the ship has been dated to 1375–80, i.e. the first years of King Oluf's reign.

The wreck itself was not in such good condition as the cog from Bremen. Only the timber ribs and the planks at the bottom, which had been covered by the ballast stones, were preserved. Originally it must have been about 16–18m long and almost 6m across. In spite of 600 years in the water there were still some pieces of the sails and cordage left. In addition to the coins, dishes of pewter and copper were found, along with two shoes, pieces of pottery and bronze pots; apart from these items everything had been destroyed by the water or swept away by the tide.

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<sup>2</sup> The cog from Bremen: See Abel, 1969.

<sup>3</sup> The cog from Vejby: Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark 1976, pp. 183–186.



To reconstruct the tragic history of the shipwreck, we have to assume that the cog was trapped by a violent storm near the entrance to the Sound and forced off course. It was lost at the foot of the steep cliffs along the coast of northern Zealand, and it is likely that most of the crew died. If not, it is strange that the captain did not salvage the money, since the wreck lay only 2m below the surface. The ship's destination may have been Lübeck, or the great herring market in Scania. The fact that nearly all the coins from the wreck were English does not necessarily mean that it came from England; gold coins were used internationally. Some marks on the pewter dishes and a little silver coin from Flanders could indicate that the ship came from the Netherlands, but this question will never be answered.

### *The war on the pirates*

The position of the Hanseatic League was a factor every Nordic king had to consider. The power of the Hanseatic towns culminated in the peace treaty of Stralsund in 1370, but nevertheless their possession of Scania for a 15-year-period until 1385 (including all the income from the herring markets) was not the economic and political triumph which they had expected.

In Denmark great efforts were made to oppose the League in every way possible. It was a serious loss to the country to be without this important part of the kingdom for so long—and would the League be willing to return the land when the time came?

Pressure was applied partly by cheating the merchants of their privileges, and partly by employing or joining the many pirates who won fortunes by attacking the heavily-laden Hanseatic cogs. After the Treaty of Stralsund the League had been imprudent enough to hand over command of the royal castles in Scania to Henning Podebusk—on the understanding that he would act on behalf of the League. However it was not long before problems arose. In 1377, around St. Michael's day (September 29th), a ship was stranded in the Sound outside Helsingborg.<sup>4</sup> The cog, whose captain was Kristian

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<sup>4</sup> The stranded cog outside Helsingborg: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 1 nr. 309 og 379, and Dipl.D. 4 rk. bnd. 2 nr. 145.

Rudiger, had been on its way towards one of the Hanseatic towns in Prussia. It proved possible to salvage the main part of the cargo, among which were 13 packages with 965 lengths of cloth and 144 pieces of 'arras' (i.e. woollen cloth from Arras in Flanders), as well as barrels with 100 lengths of 'arras' as well as other cloth, spices, rice, almonds and 66 containers of oil. The goods were taken up to the castle of Helsingborg and dried, but when the delegates from the German merchants arrived, Henning Podebusk demanded half the cargo. Later, after a compromise was agreed in Stralsund, he was contented with one tenth, which was normal practice. However it emerged that on another occasion he had salvaged 11 packages with 532 lengths of cloth and three mantles, whose value totalled 1214 'pound grot.' Henning Podebusk claimed to have no knowledge of this, and the case dragged on. At the time of his death in 1387 the affair had still not been settled.

In 1378 the League decided to deprive Henning Podebusk of the Scanian castles, and handed the command over to the town councillors of Stralsund. Apparently the merchants had lost their confidence in his loyalty, probably with good reason. In addition they were now threatened by the numerous pirates who plundered Danish waters. In 1377 there were reports of more than 200 pirates gathering near Funen, and a month later the number had doubled.

The Danes had promised to fight the pirates, but soon the League began to suspect that Queen Margrete and her government were in fact supporting them. In 1380 a Hanseatic cog with a cargo of cloth and other goods was captured during the middle of the night near Elsinore.<sup>5</sup> The League later claimed that the goods "were taken to the castle at Varberg. They were distributed in the presence of the queen, and she kept the main part of the cloth." The value of the cargo was estimated at 10,078 'pound grot,' which was the same as 40,312 Lübeck marks—a large sum at that time.

Outcry over this intolerable situation increased, and on April 25th 1381 representatives from Lübeck and Rostock came to Stralsund to discuss what measures should be taken against the pirates.<sup>6</sup> They referred to previous negotiations with two delegates appointed by the queen, the *drost* Henning Podebusk and Kurt Moltke (the queen's

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<sup>5</sup> The cog taken by pirates outside Elsinore: H.R. IV, nr. 185 § 8.

<sup>6</sup> The meeting in Stralsund April 25th 1381: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 2 nr. 129.

vassal at the castles of Vordingborg and Stegeborg), who had complained that although the queen was quite innocent, “there were rumours and accusations that the queen was covering up for the pirates, and that the stolen goods were brought to her castles.” She was equally innocent of the damages which had been inflicted on the German merchants in Scania, the Danish delegates claimed. Henning Podebusk and Kurt Moltke added that “they were sorry from the bottom of their hearts.” Nevertheless the merchants insisted that the queen should pay compensation for “the great damages which have been inflicted upon the Hanseatic towns in her kingdoms and castles.” They received only a non-committal promise that the queen would help them against the pirates.<sup>7</sup>

Just two months later the case was back on the agenda at a larger meeting in Lübeck of delegates from all the most important Hanseatic towns.<sup>8</sup> Now there were new complaints from German merchants in Tønsberg and Oslo, who claimed that they “had been seriously wronged and taxed by the queen’s vassal in opposition to the liberties and privileges which the Norwegian king had granted the Hanseatic towns and their merchants.” They had sent letters to the queen and her vassal with complaints about the taxation, but had received only the following reply: “The privileges which the king had granted the merchants had no validity after the death of the king.” What an insult!

In order to fight the pirates the League had equipped a small fleet of so-called ‘peace ships.’ Lübeck contributed one large ship and two smaller ships with 80 men, while Rostock and Wismar each contributed one large and two smaller ships with 50 men. To cover the expenses a new duty was imposed on every ship leaving Hanseatic harbours. This was a *valorem* duty in which, for example, 1% of the

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<sup>7</sup> In his new thesis A. Bøgh questions the queens role in the piracy: “Most historians have contended that Margrethe supported the pirates in the hope of pressing the Hanseatic towns into giving up their possession of the Scanian castles prematurely. However, an extensive investigation of the rather abundant material from Hanseatic archives concerning piracy provides no support for this idea” (2003, p. 352). I disagree completely with this view. The fact that the queen in several occasions was openly accused for her support to the pirates, who included several of her own commanders on the royal castles, indicates very clearly that she was involved. Besides this it is very significant, that the piracy stopped for a long period after 1386. This point of view is also shared by Olaf Olsen in his new book about the piracy in the Baltic (2002).

<sup>8</sup> The meeting in Lübeck June 24th 1381: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. II, nr. 145.

total value of the ship and cargo had to be paid in customs. However the peace ships did not have much success and nothing could stop the pirates from gathering near Helsingborg, where curiously enough the vassal had granted them a safe-conduct and failed to report their presence to the League.

But this time victory went to the merchants, who had no less than 40 ships. When the pirates tried to reach Zealand the merchants followed and managed to capture 10 of them, while the rest escaped. Five of the prisoners were thrown into the water, and the others were executed in Elsinore, where their heads were staked and exhibited as a warning to anyone who might dream of a career as pirate.<sup>9</sup>

At the end of September 1381 another meeting was held in Scania, and one of the main issues under negotiation was the fight against the lawlessness at sea.<sup>10</sup> The queen and the aristocratic council of state in Denmark were confronted over “the most serious losses which the merchants had suffered from robbery and fire, at sea and now also in Scania.” To these accusations the queen and councillors answered that “they were most sorry, and if the Hanseatics wanted to pursue those responsible, they were prepared to help, but they did not expect to have to answer questions like these any longer.” With regard to the privileges, Queen Margrete answered that “the innocent should not suffer instead of the guilty.” That answer must have puzzled the merchants a great deal, since it had gradually become clear that the queen had granted privileges to many of the pirates. A final decision was postponed until a later meeting in Nykøbing Falster in March 1382, which the queen would attend with all the council members, bringing the pirate leaders with them.

An agreement worked out by Henning Podebusk, Tue Galen, Kurt Moltke and several other councillors was made with the pirates and an armistice was agreed until May 1st. The list of pirates is rather interesting because it includes many influential people: Niels Svarteskåning was a close adviser to the queen; Henning Grubendal was the queen’s vassal at the royal castle of Søborg and Henning Vardenberg was her vassal at Abrahamstrup. Two noblemen from Scania, Trud Mus and Holger Jonsson, are also mentioned, as well as two German noblemen, Lydeke Skinkel and Eiler Rantzau.

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<sup>9</sup> Pirates taken prisoner outside Elsinore: Dipl.D. 4 rk vol. 2 nr. 181.

<sup>10</sup> Negotiations in Scania, end of Sept. 1381: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 2 nr. 165.

It was obvious that the queen, now 28, had grown familiar with the tough game of international politics. During these years her main political objective was to secure the restoration of Scania—and she did not hesitate to apply the thumbscrews. When the League asked the queen to confirm and sanction their privileges in Norway she repeated that “now that the king (i.e. Haakon) was dead the privileges were dead too.” As a trump card she produced a document from the aristocratic council in Norway which stated that they delegated all power and authority in the country to the queen until her son King Oluf had grown up. The letter was dated August 28th, just before the meeting in Scania, and was certainly written as part of the queen’s plan of action. The League no doubt recalled that the argument for postponing a decision to the Nykøbing meeting had been that the queen had to receive power of attorney in order to confirm their privileges!

The purpose of all these delays became clear during the meeting. “It would be very welcome”—as it was expressed—“if the Hanseatic League handed over the royal castles in Scania to the queen and lord Henning,” that is to say four years before the time agreed in the Treaty of Stralsund. In return, it was sweetly emphasized, all customs and rent would be allotted to the League, who would also be allowed to have their own courts of law. In addition the queen would do everything in her power to secure the rights and safety of the merchants “on land and at sea.”

The Hanseatic delegates could no longer doubt that this was straightforward political pressure: if they did not hand over Scania the piracy would continue and their privileges in Norway would be reduced or perhaps annulled.

This outcome aroused great indignation among the League delegates, and after lengthy discussions they agreed that they would not attend further negotiations with the queen. As a result no final solution could be agreed at the next meeting in Nykøbing,<sup>11</sup> although the armistice with the pirates was prolonged. Another meeting was arranged, this time in Stralsund, which was to be attended by the queen and the aristocratic council of Norway. However this promise was broken, and neither the queen nor any delegates appeared at the meeting. The situation became increasingly tense, and after the

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<sup>11</sup> Negotiations in Nykøbing Falster: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 2 nr. 228.

armistice had expired the plundering of the Hanseatic ships continued. Once again it was necessary to equip the so-called 'peace ships,' this time with Denmark's help.

At this point Queen Margrete and her closest adviser Henning Podebusk apparently changed their strategy and tried to comply with the Hanseatic League's demands. If there was to be any credibility behind their assertion that they hadn't collaborated with the pirates and therefore could not be held responsible for compensation, they had to help establish peaceful conditions at sea. Meanwhile 1385 drew near—the year in which, according to the Treaty of Stralsund, Scania was due to be handed back to Denmark. But what if the Hanseatic League claimed that their income from the region did not counterbalance all the plundering and losses they had suffered? Perhaps they would refuse to hand over the royal castles in Scania?

It may have been considerations like these which explain the changed attitude of the queen. On April 24th 1384 a large meeting was held in Stralsund,<sup>12</sup> which was attended by Queen Margrete in person as well as Henning Podebusk, Kurt Moltke and other influential members of the royal council. After long discussions with the Hanseatic League's delegates, the Danes agreed to equip nine ships with 100 armed men (in addition to the crew) to fight the pirates. The queen and Henning Podebusk would each place two ships at the League's disposal, while Kurt Moltke would contribute three ships. Several of the other councillors would each equip one ship. The League agreed to send two large cogs and four smaller ships.

However the queen did not respond to demands that she and the royal council should help to conquer certain castles which housed some of the pirates and then hand them over to the League. A final decision was to be made at another meeting in Scania on September 8th, after the Danes had consulted all the council members.

Meanwhile the general sentiment changed again on both sides, and the League ordered their delegates not to give any promise to return Scania until the Danes had paid compensation for all the merchants' losses. The queen refrained from attending the meeting at all, and the question of her confirmation of Hanseatic privileges in Norway remained unresolved.

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<sup>12</sup> Negotiations in Stralsund April 24th 1384: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 2 nr. 464.

*The reunion of Scania*

The Danes looked forward with great enthusiasm to 1385, while the League could not agree on a common line of action. According to the Treaty of Stralsund their possession of Scania for a 15-year period was to be regarded as compensation, but what in fact had they got out of it? Endless problems and trouble, and at the same time their ships were plundered by pirates who seemed to be in the pay of the Danish queen. Their expenses and losses were probably higher than their income, and now the Norwegian privileges were in dispute. It might be best to return Scania—but if they did, there was no guarantee that they would get so much as a mark in compensation.

Queen Margrete was probably well aware of these reflections among the League members. In the treaty, the day for the official transfer had been fixed as Ascension Day, Thursday May 11th 1385, and on that day Queen Margrete, King Oluf and Henning Podebusk gathered all the members of both the Danish and the Norwegian royal councils at the castle of Helsingborg on the coast of Scania. Here they demanded that the castle and the land should be returned to the Danish Crown, but the governor refused after orders from the Hanseatic League. Ten days later a letter arrived from the League with a proposal for a new meeting in Stralsund.

That was too much. Queen Margrete, King Oluf and Henning Podebusk each wrote a letter to the Hanseatic League.<sup>13</sup> King Oluf, now nearly 15 years old, referred indignantly to the way in which the governor had refused to hand over the castle. It was in direct contradiction to all agreements and treaties, and the Hanseatic League held the land and the castles “with violence and injustice.” If they did not change their attitude, the king continued, he would bring the case before “our holy father the Pope, before the emperor and before kings, princes, counts, knights and esquires, towns and countries and all good people, and accuse you for the way you withhold from us our castles against your own letters and against faith and laws.”

At the same time the queen (who had no doubt worked out the king's letter in every detail) wrote a letter herself. She urgently

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<sup>13</sup> The letters of King Oluf, Queen Margrete and Henning Podebusk, May 22nd and 23rd 1385: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 2 nr. 579–580–581.

described how the League's letter had been read out to the king and the Danish and Norwegian councillors. It had aroused great indignation, and the king had decided to answer and demand a final solution to the problem. Now the queen offered to do everything to reconcile "her dear friends" with her angry son.

In a third letter the *drost* Henning Podebusk solemnly warned the League against the consequences of their actions. Once again the embarrassing situation at Helsingborg was referred to, where the king, the queen and the members of the royal councils from both countries still waited "with great expense" for the Hanseatic League to fulfil their obligations. The *drost* asked them once again to reconsider and reflect on the agreements they had signed themselves "for reason of their good reputation, which they had from old times and still enjoyed, and which hopefully would not be lost now over such a small thing as the return of the castles!"

Possibly the queen had dictated all the letters in concert with Henning Podebusk. Her political tactic of hiding severe pressure behind an apparently mild and indulgent attitude made it difficult for her opponents to attack her, and they could never be sure of her reaction. This was the case now. The queen did not intend to humbly await the decisions of the Hanseatic League, and instead travelled to Lund with King Oluf and the Danish royal council. On Trinity Sunday (May 28th) they attended a solemn mass in the cathedral, and then went to the parliament of the province, the *Landsting*, where the king swore to preserve the peace and rule in accordance with the law and privileges of the people. The following Sunday representatives of all the inhabitants in Scania swore an oath of obedience to the young king, and he received their homage in front of the altar of St. Laurentius in Lunds cathedral.<sup>14</sup>

The queen knew that the League would avoid a war which would cost them a great deal of money and destroy a large part of their trade even if they won. For this reason she was bold enough to take control of Scania while the Hanseatic governors were still in possession of the castles. At a great meeting in Stralsund on June 24th the matter was discussed among the League members. King Albrecht III of Sweden attended the meeting in person as well as the new Duke of Mecklenburg (Albrecht IV), who happened to be the for-

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<sup>14</sup> The election in Lund: S.R.D., VI, p. 534.



mer pretender to the Danish throne and the son of Queen Margrete's sister Ingeborg. Of course their presence was due to their old claim on the Danish kingdom, and now they promised to participate in a future war against Denmark.

This proposal was received with coolness since most of the German Hanseatic towns favoured a peaceful solution. As a result Lübeck and Stralsund both sent one of their magistrates to Helsingborg, where on behalf of the Hanseatic League they handed over the Scanian castles to the queen.<sup>15</sup>

For the second time Queen Margrete and Henning Podebusk had won a great political victory, without paying anything in compensation to the League. Contemporary sources are full of admiration and even the chronicler Detmar of Lübeck had to admit, "This she accomplished with great skill."

In return the League expected a great effort to be made in fighting the pirates, as well as a confirmation of their privileges in Norway and compensation for their losses. The first demand was fulfilled surprisingly quickly. After the return of Scania the Danes equipped a small fleet which sailed through Danish waters for a month. Strangely enough the pirates disappeared for a long time, which probably confirms suspicions that they had in fact been paid by the queen. Now the merchants could sail safely through the Sound without risking lives and cargo, although they were still advised to sail in groups of eight to ten ships. In 1386 a final treaty was signed at Vordingborg castle with the pirate leaders, and the situation at sea became peaceful.

On the question of compensation Queen Margrete refused to bargain. In the middle of the summer she travelled to Lübeck to attend a meeting with the League and here she declared that "King Oluf would no longer listen to their demands."<sup>16</sup> Instead he wanted a direct answer to the following question: "Were the League prepared to give up their demand for compensation. . . . for the favour and goodwill which the King and Queen Margrete were willing to give them, or would they instead bring the matter of piracy to trial before princes and lords, who favoured both sides equally?"

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<sup>15</sup> The Hanseatic League decides to return the castles of Scania: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 2 nr. 590.

<sup>16</sup> The Hanseatic meeting in Lübeck July 13th 1386: Dipl.D. 4 rk vol. 3 nr. 59.

It should be stressed that Queen Margrete still acted on behalf of her son, but no one can have doubted that she was responsible for political strategy—even though the king was now 15 years old and therefore officially a grown man.

Since no representatives from the Hanseatic towns in Prussia had attended the meeting, no final answer could be given. The matter was postponed, and it seems the League gave up the case. It would have been very difficult to convince an impartial court of law that it was fair to demand compensation from the Danish government for plundering committed by pirates. Proof was almost impossible to obtain, and it would hardly have been wise to make the League unpopular in areas which were extremely important to their trade and economy. Nevertheless it must have been painful to give up claims to such a large sum of money!

## CHAPTER FIVE

### THE GREAT HERRING MARKET IN SCANIA

In the autumn of 1364 the French crusader and politician Philippe de Mézières was travelling in northern Europe. During his journey through the Sound he witnessed the great herring fishery, which constituted a major source of income for Denmark during the Middle Ages. His description of the scene is detailed and fascinating:

Two months a year, that is in September and October, the herring travel from one sea to the other through the Sound, by order of God, in such huge numbers that it is a great wonder, and so many pass through the Sound in these months, that at several places one can cut them with a dagger.

Now comes the other wonder: According to old custom boats and ships from all over Germany and Prussia (i.e. the Hanseatic merchants, but of course the Danes took part in the fishing as well) gather here in the Sound to fish the herring, and it is a common belief that about 40,000 boats do nothing else during these months but fish herring, and in each boat there are at least six men and in others seven to eight or ten. Besides these 40,000 boats there are 500 ships of big or medium size, which do nothing else but collect and salt in barrels the herring fished by the 40,000 boats . . . There is a great gathering of people to catch such a small fish. If you count them you will find that during these two months no less than 300,000 people do nothing else but fish.

Philippe de Mézières concludes by underlining “the grace, which God has granted Christians with this abundance of herring, with which all Germany, France, England and several other countries are fed during Lent, since poor people can buy a herring but not a great fish.”<sup>1</sup>

The account gives a lively impression of the commerce which during these short periods made the coast of Øresund the centre of Scandinavia. Today, when the herring travel by different routes, it

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<sup>1</sup> The account of Philippe de Mezieres is published in: Danmarks Riges Historie, vol. II (Erslev) 1902, s. 323, on which this translation is founded.

is difficult to imagine how the sea almost boiled with fish each autumn. In the 16thC Olaus Magnus claimed that the herring came in such numbers that if you put a halberd into the middle of the shoal, it would remain standing. The area near Skanør and Falsterbo on the Scanian coast was the centre of the herring market. Here fishermen and merchants from around northern Europe gathered during the fishing, and the area was divided into *fed*, which were special stands for foreign as well as domestic towns. The leading Hanseatic towns such as Lübeck, Stralsund, Wismar and Rostock dominated the trade, but competition from the so-called ‘*Ummelands-travellers*’ was noticeable. This was the designation for merchants from (for example) towns in the Netherlands, who travelled north of Jutland in order to reach the Scanian market. Several merchants came from England as well, and there must have been a lively international atmosphere during these busy months.

Each larger *fed* had its own bailiff, who was responsible for keeping the peace and ensuring that the market regulations were obeyed, since fishing and trade were subject to strict rules. In addition he had to make sure the rights and privileges of his town were respected.

To supervise the whole market the king appointed two *advocati*, who resided in the royal castles of Skanør and Falsterbo. These royal governors collected customs and acted as juridical and administrative leaders. The annual income from the customs of the herring market in Scania has been estimated at around 5000 German (Lübeck) marks.

Some of the fishing was done using great rectangular nets which were placed vertically in the water, while others preferred to throw out the nets from their boats and draw the catch inside. The nets’ mesh sizes were defined precisely in the ‘Mot-book,’ which contained the official rules for the market.

When the catch had been brought ashore, the fish were cleaned by ‘gill-women’ and afterwards put in barrels with layers of salt. The salt needed to preserve the fish was exported in large quantities from Lüneburg in northern Germany. In 1400 a total of 16,594 barrels of salt were exported to the herring market.

But it was not only fish which were traded at the market. The merchants brought many goods with them, which were sold from the countless stands which constituted the built-up area during these

busy autumn months. Even today archaeologists find numerous small lead stamps used to guarantee the quality of the goods, as well as lead seals from rolls of the popular Netherlands cloth. Some herring-barrels have been found elsewhere, such as that in a Copenhagen street, where it had apparently been used as a water-closet. A triangular control mark could still be seen on the lid, which probably indicated that the barrel had been rejected as poor quality; approved barrels were marked with a circle.

Both royal castles at Falsterbo and Skanør were excavated by archaeologists in 1907 and 1934–5. The mound of the small castle at Falsterbo revealed particularly interesting finds. It had an almost quadrangular layout of 33m by 28m, with double moats surrounding a small castle and curtain wall. In the outer moat six well-preserved barges were found, which had been used as foundation material for the earthwork. The largest was 18m long and 3.5m broad. It is now on show in a museum in Lund.

The excavation of the castle mound at Skanør brought forth many fine objects, such as dice, fishing-hooks, thimbles, flutes, combs, locks, parts of barrels, horseshoes etc.—all bearing witness to the busy daily life of the castle.

During the day there was intense activity at the herring-market, and no doubt the nights were spent raucously in the countless small inns and pubs. There were also brothels, and fights must have been a common sight, even if it was strictly forbidden to wear any weapons.

The Catholic Church's strict rules on Lent formed the basis of the herring market. All Christians were forbidden to eat meat on Fridays and during the 40-day fast from Ash Wednesday to Easter. However eating fish was allowed, and since everybody could afford to buy the cheap and nourishing herring, the export constituted an important source of income for Denmark. It is estimated that at its peak in the middle of the 14thC the catch was about 300,000 barrels a year. Thus Philippe de Mézière's estimate of the number of ships and fishermen is not necessarily exaggerated.

Lübeck was the hub of the important transit trade between the countries along the Baltic Sea and the countries and towns of the North Sea. Many of the town's fine warehouses have been preserved, and with the churches and the mighty gate in the city wall known as 'Holstenertor', they give a vivid impression of this Hanseatic town during the Middle Ages.

Fortunately accounts have been preserved which record Lübeck's trade with the herring market from 1398–1400.<sup>2</sup> The figures revealed are astonishing. About 70,000 barrels were imported each year into this town alone, by approximately 800 merchants. Every year 300–400 large ships, primarily cogs, and 200–300 smaller fishing boats sailed to the herring market.

Customs accounts form the bulk of the source material. Every Hanseatic ship had to pay a certain percentage of the value of the ship and its cargo at the harbour of departure. By showing his receipt the captain could take the cargo into other Hanseatic towns without further charges. All arriving and departing ships were noted and carefully registered with their cargo, so these accounts are an invaluable source of knowledge on trade in Queen Margrete's day.

### *The 'Mot-book'*

To return to the herring market in Scania—as mentioned, the coast between Falsterbo and Skanør was divided into areas called *feds*, where the various Danish and Hanseatic towns were based. Among other things this meant that foreign criminals were sentenced according to the laws of their own town, even though the general rules of the market were stated in the 'Mot-book' and laid down by the king. The name derives from the word for 'meeting' (*møde* in Danish), since the regulations were read out in Danish and German to all the merchants at a big meeting at the start of the market.

A 'Mot-book' (in a Danish as well as German version) has been preserved from the time of Queen Margrete, although it has no exact date.<sup>3</sup> It may be as late as 1410, when an old register notes 'Rules for the market in Scania, issued by Queen Margrete.' The 60 articles give us an insight into the market's hectic atmosphere; a few are given below:

1. First We (i.e. the queen) order that he who is taken under the peace and protection of our *advocati* on behalf of Us, shall be

<sup>2</sup> The Lübeck accounts were analysed by Curt Weibull in "Scandia" 1966, s. 1–124.

<sup>3</sup> The "Motbog" of Queen Margrete is published in: *Corpus Juris Sueo-Gotorum*, vol. IX, s. 462–484. Edt. C.J. Schlyter. Lund 1959. Published in Danish in: Henning S. Eriksson: *Skånemarkedet*. Wormianum 1980, s. 132.

secure and shall be granted safe-conduct. If anyone breaks this he shall pay the penalty of death.

And We order everybody to keep the peace on land and at sea, under penalty of losing life and goods.

3. Likewise We order every man with balances and measures to weigh correctly and give the merchants full measure. Anyone caught with false measures will pay with his life.
10. No fisherman is allowed to stay at a *fed* without having his stall there. Penalty: 40 marks.
14. No man is allowed to place the stakes which he uses to dry his fishing nets so close to the road that carriers and merchants are hindered. Penalty: 3 marks or the loss of the nets, as it is ordered that the king's public highways shall be free.
16. No townsman or carrier must carry herring in bags or baskets, under penalty of losing the herrings he carries.
18. Every carrier should take care that the goods of the merchants are well kept, so that he can answer for it. If he is not able to do so, he shall lose his life.
24. Anyone arrested with armour or cuirass or bludgeon, crossbow, hatchet or other weapons with which one can hurt the merchants or harm them, shall lose his life.
26. We order all captains that no-one is to salt fish in their own ship, under penalty of 40 marks.
28. We order all shopkeepers, cloth merchants, shoemakers, slaughterers and all craftsmen that they sell their merchandise at the place which has been prescribed from ancient times, under penalty of 40 marks.
33. No man is allowed to unload his ship by night, under penalty of 3 marks or loss of the goods he unloads—unless he has permission from the king's official.
34. No man may do wrong to another, whether Dane or German. He who accuses another must accuse him to the king's official, under penalty of 3 marks except in cases of life and death.
41. No bailiff is allowed to have more public houses on his *fed* than is permitted in the privileges.
49. No pile-woman is allowed to pile up the herrings in the barrels by pressure. If she is caught doing so, she can be sentenced to pay with her life.
51. He who taps wine shall measure 4 German (lükske) quarters to one cup.

56. He who buys cloth in the English booths shall iron the cloth before he carries it out of the booth, under penalty of losing the cloth.
58. If a man is involved in feuds or disputes in his native country and starts the same fight here, he shall be punished with his life.

As is clear from the articles, trade was regulated down to the smallest detail. This would have been necessary due to the huge crowds of people gathered from all over northern Europe, although the punishments seem unusually severe. But a human life was not valued in the Middle Ages as it is today, and death must have been a common sight.

In 1401 Queen Margrete pawned the Scanian herring market, including the royal income, to her good friend Bishop Peder Jensen Lodehat and the chapter of Roskilde cathedral.<sup>4</sup> The total was no less than 40,000 marks, and according to the agreement 5000 marks were to be paid every year for a period of eight years. The amount underlines the huge income derived from the herring market at that time.

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<sup>4</sup> Queen Margrete pawns Skanør and Falsterbo to Bishop Peder J. Lodehat 1401: M.P. nr. 94.



## CHAPTER SIX

### THE COUNTS OF HOLSTEIN AND SOUTHERN JUTLAND

Queen Margrete had now won two great prizes: the Danish throne and the return of Scania. Her efforts had demanded all her attention for several years. Meanwhile, the situation in Slesvig-Holstein had grown even more complex due to pressure from the Holstein nobility and their Mecklenburg allies, who were a serious threat to the balance of power in the area.

Previously the situation had seemed to favour the queen. At the time of King Valdemar's death the southern part of the duchy of Slesvig belonged to the counts of Holstein, while the northern part was controlled until 1375 by Henrik, Duke of Slesvig and the last heir to the title. His rule was very weak and in reality it was his mother Richardis, the dowager duchess, who ruled a significant part of the territory which she had received as her dowry. This included the island of Als with the castles of Nordborg and Sønderborg, as well as the districts of Rise, Nybøl, Slogs, Lundtoft and Hviding. In 1373 King Valdemar had forced her to accept him as her guardian, so in fact the duke controlled only Tønder and Haderslev.

In the past the king had raided and plundered the area right down to Fehmarn and his violent conduct was remembered. The Chronicle of Zealand tells us: "Everywhere he gathered up supplies, money, ships and other things which his eyes desired. Fear, trembling and paralysis struck everyone wherever he came, because he punished all with fire and sword, prison and death, until they obeyed his orders."

At the start of 1374 the king seized the castle and town of Haderslev, and at the *Danehof* meeting in Nyborg the same year, Duke Henrik granted him the right to redeem the castle and fief of Gottorp, which at that time was pawned to the counts of Holstein for the sum of 12,000 marks. However the counts had no intention of leaving their power base, and Gottorp remained in their hands.

This was the situation when the king died in 1375, but the picture soon altered. During the struggle for the Danish throne which followed, the counts of Holstein sought to regain their lost power in

Slesvig and eagerly supported the Mecklenburg candidate. The period was characterised by expanding German influence in the area, and we can point to the emergence of a Slesvig-Holstein nobility, which gradually replaced the old Danish nobility. Of course the new nobility benefited from the insecure situation in the duchy. After the death of Duke Henrik in April 1375, the northern part of Slesvig lay open to German invasion. Queen Margrete had all her resources employed elsewhere and was unable to secure the southern borders. However she stressed the duchy's affiliation to Denmark indirectly, by incorporating the two heraldic leopards of Slesvig in her official seal.

The queen's most noted adversaries were the two sons of the ill-reputed Count Gerhard of Holstein, who had been killed by Niels Ebbesen in 1340. The brothers Heinrich and Claus now placed themselves at the head of the Holstein nobility, which was economically stronger than the Danish Crown. Soon the island of Als was in German hands, Haderslev was occupied and Tønder was taken from Henneke Limbek, who had supported the queen. The counts of Holstein were now *de facto* lords of Slesvig, but this was not officially confirmed until 1386. At a great meeting in Nyborg on August 15th, Queen Margrete and King Oluf granted the duchy of Slesvig to the sons of the recently-departed Count Heinrich, and at the same time they were reconciled with Count Claus. A detailed description of the events was given by a chronicler in Holstein (Presbyter Bremensis) about 60 years later:<sup>1</sup>

At that time the above-mentioned queen, who was a very cunning woman, decided not to start several fires at once, but called for Count Claus of Holstein and concluded a peace treaty with him, which was to last forever, and she called him father from that time. And to his brother's son Gerhard the same queen, sitting on the royal throne with her now adult son King Oluf, solemnly gave him a heraldic standard granting him and his heirs the whole duchy of Slesvig to possess as a fief forever. This happened at the castle in the town of Nyborg in the land of Funen with the consent of all the members of the royal council and in the presence of many bishops, prelates and noblemen from the kingdom of Denmark and the land of Holstein.

The above-mentioned Gerhard, who was thus created Duke of Slesvig, bowed before King Oluf at his investiture for the duchy, and paid homage to King Oluf and his successors in the kingdom on behalf of

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<sup>1</sup> The endowment of 1386: The chronicle of Holstein (Presbyter Bremensis). Transl. A. Hude, Kbh. 1903, p. 90.

himself and his heirs, and swore allegiance to him. Likewise the older Count Claus and the above-mentioned Gerhard's brother, Albrecht, swore allegiance.

A contemporary chronicle from Lübeck, written by the Franciscan friar Detmar, gives a more detailed account of the conditions laid out in the treaty. As the original document has been lost—or perhaps it was never officially issued—this generally reliable source is of great importance.<sup>2</sup> The conditions are set out in five articles:

1. The Holsteins were to hold the duchy of Slesvig in perpetuity as an inheritance from father to son, and render the kingdom men and service for it.
2. A man of the count's family would always be lord and Duke of Slesvig.
3. No-one on either side was to fight, or permit any rivalry. If in spite of this a conflict arose, the Danes were to appoint two representatives from the council of Holstein, and the Holsteins were to appoint two from the council of Denmark. These four were to reach an agreement if possible. If this was not possible they were to appoint a judge. . . . etc.
4. Regarding the castle of Tranekær, which belonged to the duchy, the following was decided: The king of Denmark was to hold it for three years, during which period the Holsteins would rule the Frisian people (in the marches of Slesvig). . . . After three years the situation could remain unchanged, or if both parties agreed, they could exchange roles and remain friends.
5. If war occurred they were to aid each other against enemies, if asked to. They were also to maintain peace with the kingdom, both on land and against pirates at sea.

It has been discussed whether this endowment should be regarded as a victory or a defeat for Queen Margrete. Beyond doubt it was a victory for the counts of Holstein, but at the same time they had to swear allegiance to King Oluf and thus recognize Danish sovereignty in Slesvig. And what alternative did the Danish government have when the Holsteins were in possession of the area?

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<sup>2</sup> Detmar of Lübeck's Chronicle. *Die Chroniken der niedersächsischen Städte*. Bnd. 1, p. 589 f. and 596. Ed. Karl Kopp, Lübeck.

Queen Margrete and Henning Podebusk had other strategies in mind, and no intention of wasting time, money and men on endless struggles with the counts of Holstein. Characteristically the endowment was regarded by contemporaries as a great victory for the queen, according to the chronicler Detmar of Lübeck:

When this happened all the nobility of Denmark feared the wisdom and power of this queen and offered her their service. She summoned all the vassals in the kingdom and travelled around from castle to castle, where they swore her allegiance, and everywhere she transferred the vassals from one place to another, just as a prior sends his monks from one monastery to another.

No doubt the queen's political career was observed with great wonder. At first her actions had been regarded with surprise, indulgence and some irritation, for although she was her son's official guardian, everyone had expected the kingdom to be governed by the *drost* Henning Podebusk and the royal council. Again and again we hear remarks on this unusual situation. The Hanseatics sometimes called her 'the lady king,' for after a while they learned that an adroit negotiator and tough politician hid behind her friendly appearance. When the chronicler Detmar described the endowment of Slesvig in 1386 as a victory for the queen, he was probably aware that she now had her attention fixed on Sweden, and thus wanted to secure peace on other fronts. There was always a price to be paid in great affairs, although later events reveal that the queen certainly did not relinquish control of Slesvig.

Historians have wondered why, apparently, no official documents were issued in 1386. Several (Kr. Erslev and M. Linton) believe the queen did not want to issue an official sealed document in order to have a free hand in the future. According to this view the ceremony in Nyborg must be described as pure theatre, acted out in order to pacify the counts of Holstein. But can this be true?

In his thesis on Slesvig during this period, the historian Esben Albrechtsen points out that the written accounts of the event cannot be ignored. So many people were present at the ceremony that it would have been impossible to deny the endowment.<sup>3</sup> This point of view seems to me to be the most plausible, since the peace treaty

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<sup>3</sup> General references: Albrechtsen, p. 19 ff. Erslev, pp. 130–31. Linton, p. 161.

and the conditions for the endowment are referred to in such detail by the Lübeck chronicler.

Whatever the truth of the matter, the queen had secured peace in Slesvig for some time to come.

## CHAPTER SEVEN

### THE FIGHT FOR THE CROWN OF SWEDEN

On her marriage with King Haakon in 1363 Margrete had become queen of Sweden as well as Norway, and she had not forgotten the old claim to the kingdom of Sweden. The House of Mecklenburg's assumption of power in the country was a continuous thorn in her side, even though the dethronement of King Magnus Eriksson and his son and co-ruler Haakon was a result of the nobility's discontent with their government. However the new King Albrecht of the House of Mecklenburg was not popular among the inhabitants and this was a factor which was to prove useful to Queen Margrete. In this context it was an unfortunate fact that in 1371 King Haakon had dropped all claims to Sweden and renounced the title of king, as part of an agreement with King Albrecht—but only on his own behalf!

Queen Margrete continued to style herself queen of both Sweden and Norway, and seized every opportunity to promote the growing discontent in Sweden. It was obvious that the king favoured his fellow countrymen from Mecklenburg and a Swedish chronicle noted: "The Germans sat on the mountain tops like birds of prey and tyrannized the country."

Right from the start Queen Margrete seems to have aimed at recapturing Sweden. In 1382 she succeeded in having a canon from Roskilde, Peder Jensen Lodehat, appointed as bishop in Vexjö. This was a clever move. The chapter had already elected a certain Henrik Karlsson, who was studying in Paris at the time, as their new bishop. A delegate sent to Rome in order to have the election confirmed by the pope took with him a letter from the chapter, which described how all the canons—except one—had taken the important decision. This one canon lived in the enemy's country, the letter stated, and the reason was soon revealed. He had been 'bought' by Queen Margrete and was promptly sent to Rome, where he won the pope's agreement to appoint Peder Jensen Lodehat as the new bishop in Vexjö just before the chapter's delegate arrived. This coup meant that the queen now had one of her closest friends placed in a very

important position in Sweden—although the new bishop was probably not very popular among the chapter's canons. It is probable that the Order of St. Salvator, called the Brigittines, had also played a part in the new bishop's appointment. Peder Jensen Lodehat had previously been in Rome to support the canonisation of St. Birgitta, and Queen Margrete had a close relationship with the Vadstena cloister, which was the centre of the order.

This appointment is a good example of the strategy used by Queen Margrete. Events behind the scenes prepared the ground for the final encounter, but it is rare that we have the chance to observe her plans in action—partly due to their secret nature and partly because many documents and letters from the period have been lost.

The enmity between the House of Mecklenburg and Denmark gradually developed into an almost permanent state of war between Denmark and Sweden. The Annals of Scania relate that in 1384 "King Albrecht of Sweden, who had gathered many soldiers, invaded Scania and Halland and took by force the castle of Laholm, but at last Margrete, the mother of King Oluf, followed with the *drost* and the other Danes, and put the Swedes to flight. This was seen as shameful for them since they had not expected that a woman would dare to come to the royal camp."<sup>1</sup>

However the Annals of Scania were written by a Dane, who remained silent on the fact that King Albrecht managed to recapture the important Swedish castles of Öresten and Oppensten. Clearly the Mecklenburgs were planning a strong offensive against Denmark while they still had reason to believe that the Hanseatic League would try to retain Scania and join a confederation similar to the one which had defeated Denmark in 1370. Since then a new duke had followed in Mecklenburg, namely the former pretender to the Danish crown, who was a son of Queen Margrete's elder sister Ingeborg. This complicated the situation even more.

The Hanseatic League held a meeting in Stralsund on June 24th 1385, which the King of Sweden as well as the new Duke of Mecklenburg attended in person in order to offer their help in a future war against Denmark. This proposal was received with little enthusiasm, as the merchants had no wish to start a new war. As already stated, the outcome of this meeting was the decision to hand

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<sup>1</sup> The Annals of Scania (Annales Scanici): Annales Danici, p. 190.

Scania back to Denmark. This must have been a great disappointment to the House of Mecklenburg, who for the second time had to give up their ambition of creating a great realm.

For Queen Margrete it was a triumph. Control of Scania was vital in order to realize her plans of conquering Sweden. The queen now allowed Oluf to assume the provocative title of 'lawful successor to the kingdom of Sweden,' which was a great insult and could almost be regarded as an indirect declaration of war.

Unrest in Sweden was developing into a serious threat to the Mecklenburg reign. Discontent with lawless conditions resulted in widespread regret over the dethronement of the Swedish King Magnus and his son Haakon. When important fiefs and posts were granted to King Albrecht's German countrymen the Swedish nobility were outraged, and gradually a powerful opposition arose.

The Swedish *drost* himself, Bo Jonsson Grip, was one of the most powerful men in the kingdom and the head of this movement. His brilliant career in King Albrecht's service had brought him control over large areas of Sweden, and he soon became a dangerous rival to the king himself. When he issued his will on April 16th 1384, he controlled almost half the kingdom, and this document was to prove decisive for the fate of Sweden.<sup>2</sup> From the highest nobility he chose ten men as executors, among them two bishops and a son of the holy Birgitta. According to his will these ten men were to take over the government of his estates and fiefs after his death, thus putting them out of reach of King Albrecht. Bo Jonsson Grip died two years later on August 20th 1386, and the race for power in Sweden began.

King Albrecht soon realised that the basis of his government in Sweden was about to collapse. It was vitally important to reach an agreement with the executors if he was to have any chance of staying on the throne. On June 21st 1387 the king ordered the executors to come to a meeting in Stockholm in order to prove their right to govern Bo Jonsson Grip's estates. None of them appeared, and King Albrecht had to resort to more serious measures. He forced the widow to choose him as her guardian in order to claim the legacy.

At the same time he sought to stabilize the Crown's tottering finances by levying new taxes on property, which were also to be

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<sup>2</sup> Bo Jonsson Grip's will is published by H. Rosman: "Bjärka-Säby och dess ägare". 1. Uppsala 1923, s. 356 ff.



collected from the hitherto tax-exempt nobility. Of course this was not a good way to improve his popularity, and when he demanded in addition that the nobles should return the property which they had wrongfully taken from the Crown, open uproar arose among them. King Albrecht had to leave for Mecklenburg in order to raise an army.

Now the time had come for Queen Margrete to focus all her energy on winning the support of the Swedish nobility. No-one could govern the country without strong support from the nobles, and Queen Margrete knew this was of vital importance if her plans were to succeed. However it was not an easy task, for King Magnus and her late husband Haakon had been dethroned by the same nobility, who had been dissatisfied by their government. Would they now be willing to choose King Oluf and thereby acknowledge their mistake?

It became clear that the only choice lay in supporting the House of Mecklenburg or joining Queen Margrete. Strong government in Denmark had expanded the power of the Crown at the expense of the nobility, and this might have made the Swedish nobility uneasy about the future. But the situation in Sweden was confused, and gradually the noblemen began to renounce their vows of allegiance to King Albrecht. But at this point—just as a great victory appeared to be in sight—catastrophe struck.

## CHAPTER EIGHT

### CATASTROPHE AND RECONSTRUCTION

During the summer of 1387 Queen Margrete and King Oluf stayed in Scania in order to follow events in Sweden closely. Oluf was now 17 years old and took part in all important negotiations, although nobody could doubt that Queen Margrete made the decisions. In July they both stayed in the town of Ystad, where King Oluf confirmed the municipal charter of the town of Rönneby. After this they separated; Oluf travelled to Falsterbo, while Queen Margrete stayed in Ystad. But shortly after the young king reached the castle of Falsterbo he fell seriously ill. A few days later, probably on August 3rd, he died in the arms of his courtiers.

A letter written many years later describes the event: "He was cut up and embalmed as kings used to be, and lay in the church of Falsterbo with the cloth uncovered so that everybody could see his face."<sup>1</sup> This was the so-called *lit de parade*. The bowels were brought to Lund with great solemnity, while the body was taken to the monastery of Sorø and buried in the middle of the church, in front of the altar of the holy Virgin. Today his tomb has disappeared, but the tombstone has been placed in the choir. An inscription reads: "Here lies Oluf, son of Queen Margrete, who bore him by Haakon, the King of Norway."

The death of her only son must have been a terrible shock to the queen. He was the last scion of the old Nordic royal families, described in the Annals of Scania as "of nobler blood than any contemporary king because of the ancient blood of his lineage, and his royal origin on both the sword-line (male) and the distaff side." Now all of her close family had died, and everything which she had worked for during all these years lay in ruins. Every basis for her own position as ruler was gone, since her government was founded on her status as guardian for the young king.

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<sup>1</sup> The death of King Oluf: Letter of June 17th 1402: S.D. IV, nr. 2924. The Annals of Scania: *Annales Danici*, s. 190.

But the king's death came as a shock to the Nordic kingdoms as well. In Iceland it was said that "King Oluf disappeared. The Danes said that he had died, but the Norwegians would not believe it." Rumours circulated, and 15 years later the story had a strange sequel, which will be referred to later. In an astonishing way the prophecy of the holy Birgitta had been fulfilled: "The seeds (of this marriage) shall not become firmly rooted, and the inhabitants shall not rejoice over an heir."

Now there seemed to be no doubt that King Valdemar Atterdag's only surviving grandson, the 21-year-old Duke of Mecklenburg, would ascend the Danish throne. Both Denmark and Sweden would be under the control of the House of Mecklenburg, and the weak state of Norway would not be able to resist for long. As soon as news of King Oluf's death reached Mecklenburg the young duke styled himself 'heir to Denmark.' He incorporated the royal Danish coat of arms in his seal, on which a boastful inscription stated that he was King of Denmark and Duke of Mecklenburg.

### *The new regent*

In fact events turned out quite differently. On August 10th 1387—only a week after Oluf's death—Queen Margrete was elected in Lund with the following title: "Almighty lady and husband and guardian for the whole kingdom of Denmark." This epoch-making document (Plate 7), written in Danish, was (and still is) without any precedent in Danish history and deserves to be given in full:<sup>2</sup>

It shall be known to all who see this letter or hear it read, that We Vinald by the grace of God Archbishop in Trondheim, Peder by the same grace Bishop in Århus (i.e. Peder Jensen Lodehat), Henning Podebusk *drost* in the realm of Denmark, Jens Andersen, Bent Byg, Henrik Parow (a nobleman from Mecklenburg who had gone into the queen's service), Reimer Breide, Folmer Jakobsen—all knights—and Otto Jensen, Henneke Olufsen, Kurt Moltke the younger, Jacob Mus, Stig Pedersen and Albert—witness and recognize with this our open letter, that in the year 1387 after the birth of our Lord on the day of St. Laurentius in the cathedral of Lund and later the same day on the *Landsting* in Lund in the presence of several more of the men of the kingdom of Denmark, including archbishops, bishops, knights and

<sup>2</sup> The election of Queen Margrete: Dipl.D. 4 rk vol. 3. nr. 772–229–234–253.

esquires, and even more of the common men from all the lands of Denmark—we have chosen, accepted and appointed the honourable princess and mistress Margrete, Queen of Norway and Sweden, to be our almighty lady and husband and guardian for the whole kingdom of Denmark in all respects as it is described hereafter:

First, since the above-mentioned Queen Margrete is the daughter of King Valdemar and the mother of King Oluf, who were both our lords and are now dead—may their souls rest with God—and because of the benevolence and favour which we have experienced and found with her on many points, then we have agreed in harmony with her and she with us, that we shall take no other master, lord or any other man as king, nor shall we draw any man to Denmark or take any man to help, whom she opposes in any way, but only with her advice and will—and she has promised us the same. And we and our friends will follow her in good and evil. She has promised us that she will let us enjoy fairness and justice as well as the privileges which we have been granted by her ancestors and her son.

And we have with good will deliberately chosen, appointed and paid homage to her as our lady, our husband and almighty guardian of the whole kingdom of Denmark, and we will serve her loyally as Danes should serve their lady, husband and lord, until the day when she and we agree to elect and appoint a king, with her and our advice and full will—and we will not deprive her of our service and help until she with her own will refers us to the king, who she and we choose with her and our advice and will.

All these things have we—with many Danish men, archbishops, bishops, knights and esquires, prelates, merchants, citizens, peasants and several good men and common people from the Danish lands—sworn and promised to hold and fulfil without cunning or stratagem, and she has promised us the same.

This election was no less than a revolution in the constitution. The Norwegian historian Halvdan Koht describes it as “a coup d’état outside law and without precedent,” whereas Danish historians have been more inclined to regard the election as the natural course of events and a result of the queen’s strong position. Thus Aksel E. Christensen describes the election very cautiously as “constitutionally unclarified during an unusual situation.” However this judgement seems to me to be quite wrong. The election was seen as a unique event by the queen’s contemporaries so it cannot be interpreted as being simply a matter of course. The appointment of Queen Margrete as “the husband and guardian of the whole kingdom” with authority to rule until she decided to nominate a successor (in agreement with the royal council) must be described as a coup d’état, which had no basis in law or the constitution.

For a start, the manner of the election had no precedent. It was not the assembled members of the royal council who handed over the government to Queen Margrete and thereafter had her formally elected on the *Landsting*. Instead, as described in the document, the decision was taken by the Danish people, including citizens and peasants, with only a few of the royal councillors present. No doubt the support of the *drost* Henning Podebusk was decisive in the circumstances, and Peder Jensen Lodehat, now the Bishop of Århus, was also an important supporter of the queen.

Secondly, the closest male heir to the title of king was passed over, both as regards the Danish royal house and the house of the Swedish-Norwegian Folkunge lineage. It would have been clear that if the Duke of Mecklenburg ascended the Danish throne it would be tantamount to a slow abolition of the kingdom as an independent state. The House of Mecklenburg had been a hereditary enemy of Denmark for a long time, and there was no friendly feeling towards the German dukes.

Finally, it was unprecedented for the government of the country to be handed over to a woman. Even though several Danish queens during the Middle Ages can be described as strong personalities with great political influence, this was not on the same scale. Margrete's own mother Queen Helvig had lived a very retired life, although later queens such as Philippa and Dorothea took part in the administration of the economy with great energy. But in Queen Margrete's case it was quite different. It was a ruler who was chosen on August 10th 1387, "because of the great wisdom which God has given her," according to the Annals of Scania. It appears that respect for her personal capabilities forestalled serious criticism. However the basis for the government of the country remained the same and Queen Margrete promised to let the populace keep the same rights and privileges as previously.

After the election in Lund the queen travelled back to Zealand accompanied by Henning Podebusk and a large following, and on August 21st the election was repeated on the *Landsting* in Ringsted. The wording of the still-extant document is almost identical to the election letter from Lund. The journey continued to Funen, where the election ceremony took place on October 26th in the cathedral of Odense (Fig. 11), and afterwards on the *Landsting* outside. We do not know exactly when the queen travelled to Jutland, but perhaps the election in Viborg was prior to the election at Funen.

The queen's government was now firmly established, but it must have been a terrible disappointment for the House of Mecklenburg, who had once again been thwarted in the succession. In Norway no decision had yet been taken on the election of a new king, but shortly after his return from Lund, Archbishop Vinald summoned the royal council of Norway. Margrete travelled to Oslo as well, and at the end of January the council decided to follow the Danish election. On February 2nd 1388 Queen Margrete was appointed "Mighty lady and righteous husband of Norway" and in contrast to the Danish election it was stressed that she should govern the country "in all the days of her life," while the council swore obedience to her with "men and faithful service as long as she lives."<sup>3</sup> The crown of Norway was hereditary, unlike that of Denmark, where officially the king was chosen by the people. The right of succession in Norway now had to be changed in favour of Margrete, since King Albrecht of Sweden of the House of Mecklenburg had been the closest heir to the throne. Thus the House of Mecklenburg was cheated of its rights of succession in Norway as well, on the grounds that they had too often waged war on the country.

Nevertheless Queen Margrete had to have a successor, and she agreed with her councillors to nominate a young boy in Pomerania named Bugislav, who was a grandson of her sister Ingeborg. His father Vartislaus was a minor Pomeranian duke, but the boy had "blue blood" in his veins. But it was made clear that even if Queen Margrete chose to nominate him as king in Norway while she was still alive, she would retain the right to govern and lead the country.

Now—only six months after the death of King Oluf—Queen Margrete governed both Denmark and Norway in her own right. The catastrophe had turned into a triumph for the queen, although her sorrow for her son's death must have been bitter. In addition, her faithful support Henning Podebusk died around New Year 1388. The *drost*, who was about 70 years old, had been a very experienced politician and probably this chapter of Danish history would have looked quite different without this powerful figure.

His family originated from Rügen. By the beginning of the 1350s he had gone into the service of King Valdemar Atterdag, and gradually he became an influential man. In 1365 he was *gælker* in Scania

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<sup>3</sup> The election in Norway: Dipl.N. III, nr. 477. S.T. II, p. 647f.

and a few years later he was appointed as *drost*, the highest official in the kingdom after the king. Unfortunately we have very little information about his estates and fiefs in Denmark, but it appears that he had many estates in the centre of Zealand around Korsør and Sorø. In addition to these, Queen Margrete had pawned him Holbæk castle with three large districts in 1375. The rest of the family was successful as well: his brother-in-law Valdemar was Bishop of Odense and was succeeded by one of Henning Podebusk's sons. His two other sons Hans and Predbjørn married into powerful Danish noble families, and after a few years the family had become fully assimilated into Danish society, although they kept their estates in Rügen.

Queen Margrete did not appoint a new *drost* after Henning Podebusk's death. Perhaps she could not find a worthy successor, but it seems more likely that she wanted to concentrate power in her own hands. The widow Gisela Podebusk continued to call herself *drostinde*, but on October 4th 1388 she and her sons had to hand over to the queen 15 farms which the *drost* had bought or pawned.<sup>4</sup> We don't know the reason for this, but it is unlikely that this surrender of territory was forced, as some historians have suggested.

Now the time had come to look towards Sweden once more; in the interim the situation had developed with great advantage to the queen.

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<sup>4</sup> Henning Podebusk's widow returns estates to Queen Margrete: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 3 nr. 441.

## CHAPTER NINE

### “VICTORY IN THE HANDS OF A WOMAN”

Gradually the rebellion in Sweden had spread from a small inner circle of the upper nobility to a general popular rising against King Albrecht's rule. His power had been reduced bit by bit, not just because the executors of Bo Jonsson's will controlled a large part of the kingdom, but also because the king had been forced to pawn many royal castles and fiefs as a result of his serious financial problems. In desperation he tried to levy an additional tax, which was against the law. Secret negotiations slowly prepared the way for Queen Margrete's assumption of power.

A meeting at the end of March 1388 proved decisive. Twelve delegates from the royal council of Sweden met Queen Margrete at the castle of Dalaborg. No less than nine of them were also executors for Bo Jonsson. This was the same group of magnates who had led the opposition to King Albrecht since Bo Jonsson's death. On behalf of the kingdom they now elected Queen Margrete as “the almighty lady and true husband of Sweden.” They swore service and allegiance to her and promised that under no circumstances would they “negotiate, become reconciled with or accept any offer from King Albrecht or any of his helpers.”<sup>1</sup>

At the same time they handed over most of the estates, castles and fiefs which belonged to Bo Jonsson's legacy. The executors kept only two castles in Finland, which they were granted by the queen as fiefs. The councillors promised to help Queen Margrete by every means in their power to gain all the castles, strongholds and estates which belonged to “the royal crown of Sweden,” while the queen for her part promised that Swedes who held estates in Denmark and Norway could freely keep them.

Regarding the election of a new king they gave Margrete almost unlimited rights. Not until she advised that a new king should be elected (whether this was to be in her own lifetime or after her

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<sup>1</sup> The Treaty of Dalaborg: S.T. II, nr. 411 a, and Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 3 nr. 360.



death) were they allowed to acknowledge the person whom she had nominated as king. However the far-reaching authority which the Swedish councillors granted Margrete was not without conditions. She had to promise that the Swedish people would enjoy all the "freedoms and privileges which the king had granted them and their ancestors before King Albrecht came to Sweden." In addition she promised to govern the kingdom according to Swedish law and to secure the country's borders.<sup>2</sup>

Now the queen had been given the key to Sweden, but a large part of the country was still held by King Albrecht. At the end of July the city of Stockholm (which was largely populated by Germans) repeated its oath of allegiance to the king, who mobilized all his forces for the coming encounter with Queen Margrete. After having nominated his son Erik as his successor, he journeyed to Mecklenburg to raise a great army with the help of noblemen from his homeland. He knew that the hour of destiny had come for the House of Mecklenburg, and he had to concentrate his forces in order to inflict a decisive defeat on Queen Margrete.

### *The battle of Falköping*

Just after New Year 1389 King Albrecht returned to Sweden with his army. In the meantime Queen Margrete had worked hard to arm a strong force of Swedes, Danes and Norwegians. In an ironic turn of fate she appointed a renowned Mecklenburg nobleman, Henrik Parow, as commander-in-chief of her army.

The battle took place on August 24th 1389 outside the town of Falköping at a place called Falen. The contemporary German chronicler Detmar described the battle in detail:<sup>3</sup>

In the year of the Lord 1389 on St. Mathias' Day there was a great battle in Sweden near Axevalla. The queen of Norway had gathered about 1,500 armed men. The commander-in-chief was a knight called Henrik Parow. When they came to Jönköping, King Albrecht was told about them while he was attacking Axevalla. Then he turned around and marched towards his enemies, who were the Danes and also some

<sup>2</sup> Queen Margrete's letter: Dipl.D. 4 rk vol. 3, nr. 362.

<sup>3</sup> The battle of Falen: Detmars chronicle. Ed. Grautoff, 1829: Die lübeckischen Chroniken . . . , 1, p. 344.

of the Swedes. He brought his son with him as well as his cousins, Duke Johan of Stargart's son (who was Bishop of Skara), the Duke of Holstein and the Count of Ruppin. The king was eager for the fight and hurried so much that some of his people were not quite ready.

When the battle began the king had the first *avanture* (i.e. attack), in which he destroyed two cavalry units, but it did not last for long. The king lost the battle. He was captured, as were the aforementioned lords and all those who had remained with him on the battlefield. Only those who fled managed to escape. Among them there was one called Gert Snakenborg. It was his first day as a knight, and he took 60 men with him, who all fled. And it was a great event, that the battle was lost.

During the fighting the queen stayed in the castle of Varberg in Halland. When the news came that her army had won the battle, she rode to Båhus. Here she received the men who had been captured. That same night she had King Albrecht tortured so hard that he gave her the castles of Axevalla and Rumlaborg. She wanted to extort the castle of Örebro from him as well, but did not succeed.

Detmar's account is evidently written from an anti-Danish point of view. His information on the battle must have come from the Mecklenburg side but his account is the best source for the battle of Falköping. King Albrecht had decided to relieve the castle of Axevalla, which had been besieged by one of Queen Margrete's knights Niels Svarteskåning and his men. On his way the king was told that the Danish-Swedish army was marching northwards close on the heels of his own forces. He ordered his army to turn around and stop the enemy before they could unite with the Danish forces of Niels Svarteskåning. However the battle resulted in a crushing defeat for the House of Mecklenburg, and King Albrecht, his son and many German soldiers were taken prisoner. The chronicler was scandalized by the cowardice of the new knight Gert Snakenborg, who fled with his unit during the battle. It must have been humiliating for Snakenborg to hear such insulting remarks on his behaviour—although he escaped alive and avoided captivity.

The allegation that King Albrecht was tortured during the following night seems unlikely. To extort the castles of Axevalla and Rumlaborg from him would have been completely irrelevant at a time when all Sweden was open to the queen. Mecklenburg power in Sweden had been crushed, and Queen Margrete had two vital trumps in her hand: King Albrecht and his son Erik.

With regard to the size of the armies, it is extremely difficult to estimate the number of soldiers. Detmar reckoned that the Danish

army numbered about 1,500 men, and this seems likely. However it is impossible to check this figure, and normally it is wise to be extremely cautious about numbers in medieval sources unless it is a specific reference.

The core of the army was probably the cavalry, with the infantry playing a minor role. After the first encounter, in which the knights would have charged against each other with their long lances, the hand-to-hand fighting was fought with swords and bludgeons. The infantry would have been armed with bows, crossbows, spears and knives, and some of the men may have worn chain mail and iron helmets. At the end of the 14thC the old chain mail was being replaced by full armour, which could be extremely heavy. However it was only noblemen who could afford it. In addition they would have carried heavy long swords, which had to be wielded with both hands. The art of war demanded long and patient practice.

One of the fallen on the Danish-Swedish side was Henrik Parow, but grief for the many dead was lessened by joy at the great victory. News of the battle attracted attention abroad, and the Annals of Scania proudly related that after the battle the prisoners were sent to Denmark: “the kings with fetters, and the noblemen in chains. Praise the Lord for all eternity, who granted an unexpected victory in the hands of a woman.”<sup>4</sup>

Of course the legendary victory lived on in ballads and folk songs.<sup>5</sup> One was written down around 1540 and tells how King Albrecht swore never to wear a hood until he had defeated Margrete ‘Monk-lover.’ The nickname derives from a later story about a love affair between the queen and an abbot in Sorø. This slur was repudiated by the queen, who fixed a meeting-place for the battle:

Then King Albrecht answered,  
That he would win the battle.  
“For no man shall say,  
That I fear a woman.”  
Refrain: *Therefore the man lay in chains*

The ballad continues by describing how the Swedes failed to attend holy mass before going into battle. After their shameful defeat the

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<sup>4</sup> The Annals of Scania: *Annales Danici*, p. 191.

<sup>5</sup> The ballads are published by Sv.Grundtvig: *Danmarks gamle Folkeviser*. III, nr. 159.

king was sent to Margrete in chains. Now the roles had changed, and in the last verse Queen Margrete triumphantly orders:

“Fetch me thirty feet of frieze,  
And cut a hood for the gentleman.  
Then we will send it to Mecklenburg,  
And have the tail put on.”  
Refrain: *Therefore the man lay in chains*

The story about the hood is repeated in several later chronicles (Fig. 13), and soon other legends were attached to the battle. In the cathedral of Roskilde a whetstone was exhibited, which according to legend King Albrecht sent to Margrete so she could whet her needles. A banner of homespun was also shown, which the king was said to have sent to the queen in order to ridicule her. In the 17thC, during the Swedish occupation of Denmark, these objects and the queen's golden gown (Plate 4) were sent to Sweden, where they can now be seen in the cathedral of Uppsala.

For the queen it was a day to be remembered for the rest of her life. We know this from the arrangements made in part of her will, given at the castle of Kalundborg in 1411, the year before she died.<sup>6</sup> The text states that money was granted “to the honour of God and our Lady and St. Mathias for the grace and honour which they had bestowed upon these kingdoms on the day of our Lady and St. Mathias,” that is February 24th. One thousand German marks were to be distributed partly “among women and unmarried girls, who if asked can assert that they have been violated and degraded during the wars east of Øresund” and partly in masses for “the souls of those who died in these wars on land and at sea, whether they fought for or against the kingdom.”

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<sup>6</sup> Queen Margrete's donations: “Tre gavebreve af Dronning Margrete”, ed. Erslev. K.S., 3. rk. III.

## CHAPTER TEN

### THE CONSOLIDATION OF POWER

It seems that Queen Margrete moved as quickly as possible to secure her succession. At her election in Norway in 1388, she had drawn attention to a son of Duke Vartislav of Pomerania. Though only six years old, Bugislav was a grandchild of the queen's elder sister Ingeborg and thus descended from Valdemar Atterdag. The queen's choice meant that succession through the House of Mecklenburg could be sidestepped.

Around New Year 1389 the duke travelled with his son to Denmark, where the boy's name was changed to the Nordic royal name of Erik. Queen Margrete adopted him as her foster son, and at mid-summer he was presented to a large assembly in Helsingborg. A Swedish verse chronicle records the boy's election in elaborate detail. Although the account was not written down until the 1430s and thus cannot be relied on, it illuminates for us the way in which posterity saw the event. It is written in a peculiar mixture of rhyme and prose, which can be difficult to translate.<sup>1</sup> However a rough attempt reads as follows:

When everything had happened,  
as she hoped for the kingdoms,  
she had to think about  
who should govern the countries after her.  
From Pomerania she called for  
a boy of good birth named Bugislav.  
He was given another name,  
and was called Erik ever after.  
She summoned her councillors  
from all her three kingdoms.  
When the nobles were assembled,  
she said to them:  
"If you take a king, while We (i.e. Margrete) live,  
then the kingdoms will stay together."

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<sup>1</sup> The Swedish Rhymed Chronicle (Karl's Chronicle), verses 65–103. Ed. G.E. Klemming. Svenska Medelfdens Rim-kronikor. II. Stockh. 1866.

The nobles spoke together and did not fear disgrace,  
but answered her thus:

“Gracious Lady, as long as God has decided  
that we shall enjoy Your long life,  
we will have no other master.”

The queen answered them swiftly:

“We have advised you as best We can,  
and if you do not obey me, the kingdoms will be in danger,  
and after my death a quarrel will start,  
and surely the kingdoms will split.”

The queen was very angry.

The councillors became afraid

and from that time obeyed her

in order to calm her anger,

saying to her: “In all that You decide,

we will follow your advice.”

She thanked them and granted them her goodwill,

because they obeyed her,

and allowed all the councillors of the kingdoms

to pay homage to their new lord.

Queen Margrete’s strength of mind seems to have made a great impression on the medieval chronicler, although it is extremely doubtful whether he had any genuine sources for his story. It should not be read as more than an anecdote, but it is an interesting witness to the fame which attended the queen after her death.

The time had now come for her to consolidate her position in Sweden and begin to rebuild the devastated nation. In the autumn of 1389 the queen and the Swedish royal council levied an additional tax, called *en hjälp* (a help), which was to be paid by every peasant so that “this great war with the help of God and our noble Lady may come to a good and quick end, so that peace can be restored in the country, and every man can live according to the law.”<sup>2</sup>

However Margrete’s assumption of power was not as smooth as it might appear. As in Denmark, approval for the queen’s election had to be secured by money and the granting of privileges. At the same time as the extra tax was agreed, Queen Margrete also promised to grant 10,000 silver marks to the Swedish cathedrals, churches and

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<sup>2</sup> The extra tax: Finlands Medeltida Urkunder, nr. 982.

monasteries. This was a huge sum, almost equalling the total annual income of the Swedish Church. To get the money the queen was permitted to pawn royal estates, with the exception of castles and brick-built fortresses. In return the Archbishop of Uppsala, several bishops, secular councillors and knights promised "that with all their power they would aid and protect the new masters in Sweden for the present and in the future."<sup>3</sup>

The queen's Christian motives appeared to be genuine, but such a large sum demands an explanation. The Church may not have been very enthusiastic about her rule, perhaps fearing that her ambitious policy towards the Church in Denmark would also be applied to Sweden. Step by step the queen had managed to place a series of her personal friends as bishops in the Danish Church, often in opposition to decisions taken by the chapters. Many of these appointees belonged to recently-immigrated noble families, and the Swedish Church had good reason to fear that the queen would attempt the same policy in Sweden. The ten thousand marks in silver was the price of the Church's support. The queen also had to promise that vacant bishoprics would be filled with native churchmen.

### *The struggle for Stockholm*

The question of Stockholm's surrender remained unresolved, as the German majority of the population still supported King Albrecht. The city was almost impossible to take, due to its protected position on an island and its high city walls. The Germans inhabitants formed a company called the 'hood-brethren,' and after the battle of Falköping tension between them and the Swedish populace broke out in violence. Several Swedish citizens were taken to the castle as prisoners, but following an armed protest march to the city square, one was released and an agreement of peace was signed.

This was the beginning of a series of events which was to end in a massacre. A conspiracy arose between the 'hood-brethren' and the city council and on the night after Trinity (June 13th) they made their move. All the leading Swedish citizens were arrested in their homes by armed men from the castle, and after an accusation of

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<sup>3</sup> Margrete promises to grant the church 10,000 marks: S.T. II, p. 475.

treason had been read aloud, they were taken to prison. Those who had fled to the churches and monasteries were dragged out and brought to the castle, where they were tortured. The next day three of the prisoners were burnt. The promise of half the remaining prisoners' property was enough to persuade the royal castle's fiefholder, Herbert Königsmark of Mecklenburg, to get rid of them. On the night of June 16th they were taken to K  ppplingeholmen and burnt. Three hundred more Swedish citizens were expelled from Stockholm.<sup>4</sup>

Queen Margrete's troops besieged the city throughout the winter of 1389 and the following spring, but her attempts to capture this final Mecklenburg stronghold in Sweden seemed doomed to fail. Preventing the supply of food to the city proved extremely difficult. The Mecklenburg defenders would not concede this last remnant of their power without a fight to the finish, even though King Albrecht and his son were prisoners in Denmark.

Mecklenburg supporters armed a great pirate fleet, with the double aim of plundering Danish ships and relieving the besieged city with food and ammunition. For this reason the pirates called themselves the 'Vitalie-brethren' (from the German *viktualie*—food). The German chronicler Detmar relates that "an ungovernable crowd of noblemen, citizens, craftsmen and peasants assembled from everywhere" in order to try their luck, and it soon became clear that the pirates' patriotic stance was no more than a thin veneer. Soon they were plundering "all the Baltic and every merchant, and robbed from both friend and enemy, so that travel to the great herring-market in Scania had to be halted for three years, and thus herring was very expensive during this time."<sup>5</sup>

The Hanseatic League was outraged, and when the towns of Wismar and Rostock in Mecklenburg became rallying-grounds for the pirates, the members sent an indignant letter, dated June 30th 1391, to their former partners. They expressed regret that King Albrecht and his son—always friendly towards the League—had been taken prisoner, but then went straight to the point: "You have informed us that you have opened your harbours to all who at their own risk will fight the kingdom of Denmark. This seems to be both unjust and inconvenient to all those merchants who are friendly to

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<sup>4</sup> The struggle for Stockholm: S.R.S. 1, 2, pp. 212–15.

<sup>5</sup> The Chronicle of Detmar, ed. Grautoff, pp. 359–360.



both sides and have nothing to do with your war.” The League did not want to see a blockade of their trade with Denmark, and made it clear that they would not get involved in the struggle and would continue their business as usual.

By degrees the House of Mecklenburg became isolated, and King Albrecht’s cause seemed so hopeless that none of his previous allies were ready to spend money or men to help. But the ‘Vitalie-brethren’ won an astonishing victory in August 1391, when a son of Johan of Stargard, commanding a large fleet, managed to break the Danish blockade of Stockholm and bring supplies to the city. One of Queen Margrete’s fortifications was taken, but soon the situation was restored.

In October the first peace conference was held in Nyköping in Sweden. No agreement was reached and new negotiations were arranged for the summer of 1392. This meeting, held at the castle of Vordingborg, was attended by Queen Margrete herself and several councillors from Denmark and Sweden. The dukes of Mecklenburg appeared, as did Duke Gerhard of Slesvig, Count Claus of Holstein, Count Herman of Schauenburg, Duke Vartislav of Pomerania and representatives from the Hanseatic League. King Albrecht was brought to Vordingborg from the castle of Lindholm in order to take part.

The queen opened the meeting by sharply rejecting accusations of secret negotiations with two delegates from Wismar and Rostock. In return she accused the Mecklenburg party of having applied for help and support to the Grand Master of the Teutonic Order, against all previous treaties. The meeting ended with the proclamation of an agreement between King Albrecht and Queen Margrete, dated July 10th, which beyond doubt was dictated by the queen.<sup>6</sup> Conditions for the king’s release were severe. Foremost was the surrender of Stockholm and the king’s remaining estates in Sweden, as security for his ransom of 50,000 marks. The pledge could not be redeemed until Queen Margrete’s death. The king also had to swear never again to wage war against Denmark, Sweden or Norway. In return Queen Margrete promised to pay him 10,000 marks and ensure that none of his supporters in Germany or Sweden would be pursued.

These conditions were unacceptable to the Mecklenburg side. With only a short deadline of August 4th for ratification, negotiations broke down and piracy broke out again. But the queen contemplated the

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<sup>6</sup> The Treaty of Vordingborg: July 10th 1392: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. IV, nr. 583.

situation calmly. Power was in her hands and King Albrecht had now been her prisoner for four years. She had also signed a peace treaty with Slesvig-Holstein on July 12th 1392.<sup>7</sup> Despite previous promises they had joined the Mecklenburg side during the war, but the queen preferred to overlook this in order to consolidate her position.

*Raiding by the 'Vitalie-brethren'*

The raids of the 'Vitalie-brethren' quickly became a serious threat to peace at sea. In the spring of 1392 they attacked the ship of Bishop Thord of Strängnäs and carried the reverend father as a prisoner to the castle of Stockholm. Here he remained for one and a half years by order of Duke Johan the Younger of Mecklenburg, despite the fact that this outrage was condemned by all God-fearing men. An angry report sent to Rome stated that "the bishop sits with chains around his neck and feet." He was not released until the Archbishop of Uppsala excommunicated the pirates and put Stockholm under interdict.

Every possible means of opposition was now employed against the pirates. In 1392 a great company of them attacked a peaceful ship from Stralsund. This time, after a long battle, the merchants managed to overpower the pirates and more than a hundred were taken prisoner. Later it was said that they were put into empty herring barrels, and after holes had been cut in the lids for their heads, the barrels were nailed down. Then the barrels were stacked on top of each other, and the ship sailed back to Stralsund. On arrival, the pirates were taken to the place of execution and beheaded. According to tradition this cruel practice with the barrels had been used by the pirates themselves, but this may be no more than a story.<sup>8</sup>

Insecurity at sea was so great that trade and economy were threatened across wide areas of the Baltic. The three-year failure of the herring market was a serious blow, not just to the Danish treasury and mercantile profit but also to small household budgets affected

<sup>7</sup> The peace with Slesvig-Holstein July 12th 1392: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. IV, nr. 584.

<sup>8</sup> Many 'Vitalie-brethren' taken prisoner by Stralsund merchants: Korners Chronica Novella, nr. 701. (1054) under 1392. Quotation from: Reimar Kock's kronike, ed. Grautoff, s. 495.

by rising prices. The Prussian Hanseatic towns of Danzig, Königsberg, Elbing and Thorn ordered that no ship should attempt to go through Øresund alone, but should sail in fleets of at least 10 ships. Towns in the Netherlands announced that anyone intending to sail to the Nordic countries must do so at their own risk.

At the end of April 1393 the English King Richard II offered three fully-equipped and manned ships for the aid and defence of the Nordic kingdoms, because he wanted to confirm his friendship and alliance with "his dear sister, the Queen of Norway, Sweden and Denmark". The Danish delegate Sven Stålfod was authorized to take the ships to Denmark.

The raiding continued; at Easter 1393 the 'Vitalie-brethren' arrived in Bergen in Norway with four large ships and 900 archers. They overpowered the town's municipal corporation, arrested the royal official and forced the citizens to swear allegiance to the imprisoned King Albrecht. Fortunately most left after a short time in the town, and the Norwegians were able to overpower those who remained.

#### *New peace negotiations*

In the long run these conditions were intolerable to all. Both sides agreed to let the Hanseatic League mediate, and a meeting was arranged for September 8th 1393 in Falsterbo. Negotiations were then postponed to the end of the month, because the League delegates had been unable to sail due to bad winds and weather. This is revealed in a letter sent back to the Prussian towns together with the latest news of the brethren.<sup>9</sup> Many new League ships had been captured and taken to Wismar. Here the booty was put ashore and the ships were quickly manned again by the Mecklenburg pirates, who "took everything which came in their way." Lübeck promptly sent representatives to Wismar to demand the restoration of the stolen goods and emphasise once more that the merchants had nothing to do with the war. The response was that nothing would be restored until the results of the meeting in Denmark were known.

The meeting was thus eagerly anticipated not only by the warring sides but also by the League, "because all hope regarding the

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<sup>9</sup> The letter from the Hanseatic League: H.R. IV, nr. 160.

goods stands to God and this day.” Queen Margrete and most of the Danish royal councillors attended in person. From Mecklenburg came Duke Johan the Younger with his advisers. The main issue was the agreement of conditions for King Albrecht’s release. It was inevitable that Queen Margrete would insist on the surrender of Stockholm in any peace treaty, so negotiations were to concentrate on the details of this demand. League accounts give a good impression of the discussions which took place.<sup>10</sup>

Duke Johan began by suggesting that King Albrecht should be allowed to participate in the negotiations. However the queen answered that “it would be impossible to bring the king to and from the meeting, but if the duke and his advisers wished to ride to Lindholm castle themselves, they were welcome to do so.” The duke thought this pointless, and the discussion soon reached a deadlock. The League suggested a compromise in which King Albrecht would be released for two or three years, during which time Stockholm would be handed over as security to four persons approved by both parties. If Queen Margrete and King Albrecht failed to reach a final agreement during this period, King Albrecht was to be returned to his prison. If he refused, Stockholm would be surrendered to the queen.

The proposal was received quite well, but the parties could not agree on the four persons to be appointed. The Mecklenburgs then suggested the League should administer Stockholm for this period, but “to this the queen answered with many elaborate words, that she would be happy to agree provided it could be done honourably. However she had to consult the royal councillors of Norway and Sweden, who were not present, as she had promised that nothing would be decided without them.” In this way she avoided making a decision, for although she did not wish to reject the League’s proposals outright, she was not prepared to release King Albrecht on such weak terms.

The meeting ended with an agreement that new negotiations would begin after Christmas, and in the meantime the queen would consult her councillors. However when the time came, she cancelled these plans and concentrated all her energy on the conquest of Stockholm, appointing Algot Magnusson and the wealthy royal coun-

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<sup>10</sup> Negotiations in Falsterbo, September 1393: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. V nr. 82.

cillor Abraham Brodersen to lead the Danish-Swedish army. By this time the situation in the city was almost catastrophic. Lack of food had brought famine very close, and the exhausted Germans could barely fight—but their luck still held.

Winter was hard at the beginning of 1394 when the ‘Vitalie-brethren’ tried to relieve the besieged town with eight heavily-laden ships. The ships became trapped in ice at the small island of Dalarö, not far from the entrance to Stockholm harbour, and as news of their arrival spread they prepared themselves for an attack from land. During the night they crossed the ice to the shore and cut down many trees, which they stacked around the ships as a defensive wall. Then they poured water on it, which froze immediately and made the surface smooth and impossible to climb. The ice around the wall was deliberately weakened, so that when the Danes attacked the ships with a type of catapult called ‘cats,’ the ice broke and the Danes drowned in the freezing water, while the pirates taunted them by shouting “Kis, Kis, Kis” as if calling cats. A short time later a thaw melted the ice and the eight ships with their invaluable cargo were able to sail into Stockholm harbour without further difficulty.<sup>11</sup>

The brethren stayed in the city and 10 of their leaders founded a ‘perpetual mass’ on June 24th in the church of St. Nikolai in honour of God, the Holy Cross, St. George and St. Gertrud and all the other saints. In return the priest was to pray for King Albrecht and his pirates.

Not surprisingly, Queen Margrete was infuriated by the continued raiding of the Mecklenburg pirates. However the Danes themselves were well-experienced in the noble art of piracy and the queen now equipped her own fleet to pursue her enemies. Unfortunately the Danes were also tempted to plunder trade ships, and as a result the League once again voiced complaints of the queen’s complicity in piracy.

The situation became so serious that the Prussian Hanseatic towns met in Thorn on April 18th to call for war against the queen unless their demands for compensation were met. The list of their losses reached back to 1377, although they had officially given up these compensation demands in 1386. Now the old complaints were brought out again and added to the latest tally.

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<sup>11</sup> The ‘Vitalie-brethren’ in Stockholm: *Komers Chronica Novella*, nr. 707 (1067) under 1394.

*The wreck on Skagen*

One of the strongest complaints was made over a large trade ship which had been stranded on Skagen on March 31st 1387. Skagen was the sandy spit of land at the top of Jutland which had to be passed by all ships sailing from the North Sea towards the Baltic. Captain Lubrecht van der Beke and several other German citizens had a share in the valuable cargo, which consisted mainly of different types of cloth. The hulk was probably on its way back from the Netherlands, which was then the centre of a large cloth industry.

Details of the stranding were now repeated to validate the demand for compensation: "On the first day 676 whole pieces of cloth were rescued, with 185 half-pieces as well as linen and other things. These goods were taken to the nearest church. The next day seven packages of cloth were rescued. They were taken by the priest to another church about a mile away. On the third or fourth day—when the royal official arrived and confiscated all the goods on Skagen and had the crew's possessions removed—several open letters were written to the queen: one to her, one to the royal official and one to the merchants."<sup>12</sup>

Then follows a copy of one of these apparently identical letters, in which the merchants complained of the injustice they had suffered, in contradiction to "the peace which the king has sworn and ordered in his countries, so that the beach is free, and merchants may land and rescue their cargo." This referred to articles in the Treaty of Stralsund, but these were different to the old traditional wrecking rights, which were no doubt a lucrative business for the local population as well as the royal official.

It appears from the letter that the royal official had confiscated most of the rescued goods from one of the churches, and more goods from the wreck had since been stored there, including a barrel of sugar, two pots of *walradis* (a type of whale-oil used as medicine) and 44 pieces of Arras cloth. All this was then taken to the royal castle of Rugtved "for the need of the king and the queen." The seven packs of cloth which had been taken to the other church were confiscated by the priest himself, although he swore "on his dignity

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<sup>12</sup> The stranding on Skagen: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. III, nr. 202, 203, 373, 378, 380.

as a priest to report to the king and the queen how many lengths they contained."

After this record of events the letter added a long list of all the goods in the cargo, written under the names of the importers. Only a small part of the cargo had been rescued, which made the confiscation harder to bear and intensified the merchants' efforts to have the goods returned. There was also the hope that the case would create a precedent for similar incidents.

To the first complaint the queen answered that she would arrange a meeting in the autumn to discuss the matter. However she demanded a detailed list of everything which had been rescued, and asked for a committee of four or six men from the towns of Lübeck, Wismar, Rostock and Stralsund to examine the case. "What they advised her to do with the goods from Prussia, she would do."

During later negotiations in Helsingborg in the summer of 1394 it emerged that the queen had received 250 pieces of cloth, 100 pieces of *kirzei* (a type of woollen cloth) and 50 pieces of Arras cloth, with an estimated value of 2750 nobles. From this amount the queen paid 600 marks (about 320 nobles) to Lübeck, but declared of the excess that "she and her son had not taken or received more than was fixed in the privileges."

To a series of other demands the queen gave answers such as: "This had not come to her knowledge," or "The ship had brought provisions to the enemy." A few recent cases were examined more closely, and occasionally she gave a more favourable answer. In 1390 a cog belonging to captain Lubert von Telgetin had been stranded near the island of Bornholm with a cargo of copper, wax, furs and other goods, probably from the Russian markets. It was not long before the royal official arrived and confiscated the goods, which had a value of 3521 nobles. The captain was able to prove the exact value of the cargo on the basis of sealed letters from the Hanseatic town of Thorn. In spite of this, no agreement on the case was reached at the meeting.

Another Hanseatic cog had been stranded on Bornholm in 1393. Legal rights for taking wreckage on Bornholm belonged from ancient times to the Archbishop of Lund, whereas beaches elsewhere in the kingdom belonged to the king. Most of the cargo was salvaged by the archbishop's representative, who took the goods to his master. The archbishop kept the best pieces of cloth and the finest goods, and the rest was returned. Among the confiscated objects was a

package containing “books and treasures, silver and gold, which were worth a lot of money.”<sup>13</sup> Naturally the merchants were unhappy at their treatment. At the Helsingborg meeting the archbishop was sentenced to pay back 5000 nobles to the owners, which was a fair part of the estimated value. The amount was to be paid over a three-year period on condition that if the archbishop failed to pay the fixed instalments the Germans could demand the whole sum.

*New negotiations for peace*

Conditions for a final peace were also drawn up in Helsingborg that July. King Albrecht and his son had now been prisoners for five and a half years and despite the disruption caused in Nordic waters by the ‘Vitalie-brethren’ the Mecklenburgs’ rule in Sweden was over. This must have been clear to everyone. Negotiations dealt as usual with the conditions for the king’s release, and as always the surrender of Stockholm and King Albrecht’s official renunciation of the Swedish throne were of paramount importance to Queen Margrete.

The main points of the Hanseatic League’s proposals from the Falsterbo meeting the previous year provided the starting point. Unfortunately no detailed record of the Helsingborg meeting has been preserved, but the results are mentioned in Hanseatic sources.<sup>14</sup> King Albrecht was to be released for six months for the enormous ransom of 60,000 silver marks. If he failed to pay this before the deadline, either Stockholm would be handed over to the queen, or the king and his son would be returned to prison. Since it was extremely unlikely that the king would be able to gather such a large sum, the queen’s possession of Stockholm seemed secure. Although King Albrecht’s title was no more than an illusion by this time, there was no demand that he should renounce it. During the six months of his release Stockholm was to be governed by the Hanseatic League—a financially onerous task. The date for the final peace was fixed as All Saints Day (November 1st), but this was later postponed to spring 1395.

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<sup>13</sup> Two strandings on Bornholm: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. IV, nr. 312, 651, and H.R. IV, nr. 185 § 9–10, nr. 236 IV § 13, 1

<sup>14</sup> Negotiations in Helsingborg, 1394: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. V, nr. 257. The Chronicle of Detmar, Grautoff, p. 363.



The Helsingborg meeting had a dramatic ending, as described by the chronicler Detmar: "In a public house were assembled both Germans and Danes who started to quarrel, at first with words but later with blows, and dreadful murder was committed. A mayor from Stralsund named Gregor Swerting ran up to the queen at the castle in an attempt to secure a truce. However on his way he met an angry Dane with a sword, who struck the mayor through his head, so that he immediately died. This was deplored by many good people."

No other sources have been preserved which confirm the story, but normally Detmar was well-informed and we know for sure that Gregor Swerting took part in the meeting. Relations between Danes and Germans were clearly tense, but the dramatic episode did not influence the negotiations.

During 1394 the 'Vitalie-brethren' had intensified their attacks again and Bergen once more suffered the loss of "immense treasures." At Helsingborg Queen Margrete and the Hanseatic League agreed on a mutual campaign to stop the piracy. The League had already decided to launch a large fleet of 36 cogs and four so-called 'Rhine ships' with 3600 armed men in all. Discussions centred on how many ships each town should send. A delegate from Riga reported that the town of Lübeck would sail to Helsingborg with 50 large and small ships. In the same report the power of the brethren was calculated at around '300 sails;' if this is correct they posed a very serious threat. It would have been clear that when the final peace treaty was sealed the brethren's profitable business would lose any excuse of legitimate warfare. If they were to carry on raiding once the harbours of Mecklenburg had been closed to them, they needed a secure base. The large island of Gotland in the Baltic Sea was very suitable for their purpose. In April 1395, under the command of Duke Johan the Younger of Mecklenburg, a large fleet conquered the city of Visby just before another meeting in Falsterbo.

Councillors, clergymen and noblemen from throughout the Nordic countries gathered, and the great Hanseatic towns sent their mayors and town councillors. Duke Johan the Elder and Duke Johan the Younger came from Mecklenburg with their advisers, while the Teutonic Order was represented by two high-ranking officials. Queen Margrete arrived at the end of May.

Agreements reached at Helsingborg were to form the basis of discussions, but the situation had changed since then. Queen Margrete demanded that Visby should be surrendered at once. The Hanseatic

mediators suggested it would be a fair solution if the Mecklenburgs kept Visby until the agreed deadline, while Queen Margrete held the rest of the island. Another controversy arose over the time limit imposed on the king for payment of his ransom, on penalty of the surrender of Stockholm. Queen Margrete insisted that six months was adequate, but the Mecklenburg party thought this was far too short a time and suggested three years instead. This proposal was supported by the League mediators and finally the queen agreed. It would have been an impossible task to collect 60,000 marks in silver in six months and the mediators declared that unless the limit was extended to three years they could not answer for the results.

Control of Stockholm still had to be settled, and soon it became obvious that King Albrecht had to participate in the discussions. The meeting was moved to Lindholm castle, where the prisoners had been kept since the battle of Falköping. There were not enough rooms in the castle for all the noble guests and many had to sleep in tents outside. Negotiations were concluded at last and the peace treaty was dated June 17th.

### *The Lindholm Treaty*

The original Lindholm Treaty is preserved in the state archives in Copenhagen.<sup>15</sup> It is a beautiful document, written on parchment with no less than 90 seals. Its condition is surprisingly good and the writing can be read without difficulty on the almost velvety surface. This prepared calf skin was the material normally used for letters and documents in the Middle Ages; paper did not make an appearance until the end of the 14thC. As today, two copies were written, and the document sealed by the Mecklenburgs was given to Queen Margrete and vice versa. Thus it is the Mecklenburg copy which has been preserved in Denmark, while the other has been lost.

The conditions stipulated that King Albrecht should be released for three years. At the end of this time, on September 29th 1398, there were several alternatives. If the king paid the huge ransom of 60,000 silver marks, war for the control of Stockholm could not

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<sup>15</sup> The Treaty of Lindholm, dat. 17/6 1395: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. V, nr. 384–385. H.R. IV, nr. 262 ff.

begin without one year's warning. If he was unable to pay, he and his son would be returned to prison, and the peace could be renounced with only nine weeks' warning. Finally, if King Albrecht chose to surrender Stockholm to Queen Margrete, the peace would be eternal.

The issue of Gotland was solved by a decision to retain the status quo as of April 23rd. For the next three years Visby would be held by the Mecklenburg party, while the main part of the island would be held by Queen Margrete.

The treaty ended—after several warnings against breaking the peace or building new fortifications—with a long list of the noble persons on both sides who witnessed the agreement.

Special documents were issued for the administration of Stockholm. These stipulated that during the three-year period seven Hanseatic towns (Lübeck, Stralsund, Greifswald, Danzig, Thorn, Elbing and Reval) would be responsible for governing the city. In order to indemnify the League for the great expense involved it was decided that King Albrecht and the Hanseatic towns in Mecklenburg would each pay 1000 marks, and Queen Margrete would pay 2000 marks. King Albrecht was allowed some respite, probably due to his ransom obligations.

The League's mediators eventually returned home with the hope that peace was restored, even if it was only temporary. King Albrecht had little chance of scraping 60,000 marks together, so the fate of Stockholm seemed sure—provided of course that the king did not opt to return to prison! The pirates were ordered to stop their raids, and the towns of Rostock, Wismar, Visby and Stockholm were forbidden to allow any ship to leave harbour which might threaten the queen's men or the Hanseatic merchants.

The surrender of Stockholm to the Hanseatic League took place on August 31st, but King Albrecht and his son were not released until the end of September, when they were handed over to Hanseatic delegates in Helsingborg. They had remained prisoners for the seven years which had passed since the battle of Falköping. Bitterness and humiliation may have haunted Albrecht, but he had not yet renounced his royal title. Ballads and popular stories about the king in chains and the triumphant queen circulated among the people, and were later written down.

It was not long before the king attempted to form an alliance with other powerful lords from northern Germany in the hope of recapturing Sweden, but all his efforts proved fruitless.

## CHAPTER ELEVEN

### QUEEN MARGRETE AS LEGISLATOR

Up to this point the fighting in Sweden had occupied most of the queen's time, but now she was able to focus at last on legislation and domestic policy in the kingdoms. Anarchy had spread alarmingly, and there were reports of violence everywhere. A typical incident occurred in Ribe soon after the queen came to power. Jacob Jensen, a former mayor and town councillor, forced his way into the town hall and seized the town's official seal. On New Year's Day 1377 he went with a crowd of armed men to the cathedral and barricaded the great tower. The royal captain of Riberhus castle was seriously wounded when he tried to drag Jensen from the building, and the tower was stormed only after a siege. Jensen was expelled from the town, which seems quite a mild punishment considering the town courts' reputation for harsh sentencing.

At the *Danehof* meeting that same year a general 'Peace' had been issued for the whole kingdom, but the representatives of law and order were unable to enforce it. The nuns of the convent of Dalum on Funen complained about a nobleman named Henrik Spek, who had forced his way into the convent with a group of armed men and violated the defenceless inhabitants. Another convent, St. Agnes near Roskilde, complained that local noblemen had confiscated several estates belonging to the nuns. In Scania over 200 churches had been destroyed during the war. Radical reform was needed.

The main judicial institutes of the kingdom were the town courts, district courts, the courts of the provincial parliaments (*Landsting*) and the royal court of justice. Great efforts were now made to enable these to function as intended. Although Queen Margrete sent a representative to the royal court when events required her presence elsewhere, she generally tried to follow even the smallest cases brought before it, which indicates how involved she was at this period.

These cases were extremely varied. One concerned a dispute in Århus between the citizens and the canons over the boundaries of the town-field. According to medieval practice the queen had to "ride the boundary," which meant in practice that she and the royal

council fixed the boundaries of "how broad and how long the field ought to be in order to cover the requirements of the poor in Århus, and the town's sheep and other beasts." At the other end of the scale the queen's court had to judge instances of murder. In the Middle Ages especially these cases were often considered to be a matter for the involved families, in contrast to crimes which violated the common interests of society. Because of this blood vengeance was common, even if a murderer had been outlawed or sentenced to death.

Queen Margrete's efforts to stabilize social conditions also helped to increase the power of the Crown. In 1396 the 15-year-old Erik of Pomerania reached adulthood, and the young king now received official homage from the people of Denmark and Sweden. He had already been approved in Norway in 1389 according to the law of heredity in that kingdom. At the beginning of 1396 the king was formally enthroned and greeted by the provincial parliaments of Denmark. The election in Sweden followed the same summer, and according to old tradition he was welcomed on July 23rd at Mora.

*The laws proclaimed in Denmark in 1396*

Neither in Denmark nor in Sweden did the king have to seal a coronation charter (*Håndfæstning*) as his predecessor King Oluf had done. During Queen Margrete's reign the Crown had become so powerful that the nobility could no longer make demands or set conditions. Now the opposite was true, illustrated by new legislation which dramatically limited the rights of the nobility. These laws have been preserved in two almost identical versions from Jutland and Funen, and it is likely that all the provincial parliaments received a copy.<sup>1</sup>

The legislation of 1396 is a key source for our understanding of Queen Margrete's political objectives, so I will discuss the 17 clauses in some detail. The text is in Danish and by way of introduction Queen Margrete salutes the populace of northern Jutland. After encouraging the inhabitants to pay homage to King Erik "like all the others in Denmark," the new laws agreed by the queen and the

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<sup>1</sup> The law of 1396 is published in: Den danske rigsløvgivning indtil 1400. Ed. E. Kroman. Nr. 35 and 36.

royal council are proclaimed. Margrete orders the inhabitants to “observe the new rules as they are written, and hereafter obey the royal orders in a better way than you have done before; you will be punished if you fail to do so.”

### *Clause 1*

Firstly We ask and order on behalf of King Erik that all illegal visiting must stop, by both laymen and learned, whoever they may be, and that you observe church-peace, women-peace, house-peace, farm-peace, plough-peace and court-peace, as well as all other peace as the law books order, or be punished.

The term ‘illegal visiting’ refers to the harsh and unlawful exploitation of the peasants’ duty to house and feed the landlord or the bishop (and their men and horses) when they were travelling. This duty, which the nobility also owed the king, incurred great costs and it seems to have become a serious nuisance towards the end of the 14thC.

The strong injunctions to observe the peace are also striking, particularly the so-called ‘women-peace.’ During times of war and internal struggles the risk of rape was greater than usual, but as far as I know this is the first and only time such a term is used in Danish law. Although the provincial and town laws often prescribed the death-penalty for this crime, it seems likely that Queen Margrete as a woman underlined this point. We find the same attitude in her will of 1411, in which she granted a sum of money to women who had been violated and humiliated during the wars.

### *Clause 2*

On behalf of King Erik We order that no one is allowed to house or help any outlawed man or other criminal, but must at once bring him to the court and have him tried. He who houses or helps such men must pay for it or receive the same sentence as the criminals.

Outlawing was a common sentence for murder and other serious crimes; apparently the strict rules against helping outlaws had been ignored during the recent unstable times.

*Clause 3*

Since very little justice has come from the fortifications which have been built until now, We forbid the building of new fortifications or castles, in order to restore peace, law and order in the country. Therefore We order the royal vassals and officials not to permit anyone to build fortifications or castles (*barfred*).

With this edict Queen Margrete struck a deadly blow at the nobility. For a long time she had aimed to curb their power, and had tried to do so by having as many private castles as possible pulled down. In 1393 she granted the Church several donations: the Bishop of Børglum received the castle of Rugtved; the Bishop of Viborg received the castle of Hald; the monastery of Our Lady in Ålborg received the castle of Egholm and the monastery of Our Lady in Roskilde received Ketilstorp—but each on the condition that all buildings “of stone and timber should be pulled down at once.” Now with one stroke she stopped all private castle building by individuals. The prohibition appears to have been respected. It was not until 1483 that King Hans in his coronation charter had to allow the nobility the right to build castles again, thereby repealing the old prohibition.

*Clause 4*

On behalf of the inhabitants of the whole country the provincial parliament has agreed with the king and with Us on his behalf that all farms and other estates which belonged to the crown before King Valdemar—Our father, may his soul rest with God—travelled from Denmark to Germany (i.e. 1368) shall be returned to the Crown. But likewise if the Crown has received any estates unjustly, they shall be returned to the rightful owner. Therefore if anyone has gained another man's estate unjustly it must be returned immediately. . . .

The section continues with a detailed description of how all cases should be reported to specially-appointed courts consisting of six noblemen and six peasants as well as the local bishop, the provincial judge and the king's representative. The royal chancellor, Bishop Peder Jensen Lodehat, was given particular authority to appoint members of these courts. Through this law Queen Margrete tried to remedy circumstances which had arisen since 1368 by which the nobility had gradually taken over a large number of estates originally belonging to the Crown. On Crown estates the peasants had

to pay taxes, whereas farms owned by the nobility were tax-exempt, so the Crown had lost considerable income by this development.

The well-known Danish historian Kristian Erslev remarked of this law, “Nothing shows the power of the queen better than this decision to regain the royal estates, and the fact that the reforms really were carried out.” Several judgements from the next few years prove that the new law was enforced extremely effectively. The Crown regained a significant number of estates in this way, and I will look at some of these cases more closely in a later chapter.

#### *Clause 5*

In addition the good men of the kingdom have consented not to take or buy peasants’ land, or reduce the royal income in any way, until God decides that he (i.e. the king) is grown up and after that We hope in God that he and they will agree about this and much more.

This section is clearly a continuation of the former—although the nobility were only bound until the king had reached adulthood.

#### *Clause 6*

It was also decided that the peasants who have not belonged to the Crown since the above-mentioned time shall pay their tax (*landgilde*) this year as well as three marks in *førlov*, and return to the Crown as before.

The peasants who had become copyholders of the nobility since 1368 were to return to the Crown and pay the ordinary tax called *landgilde*, which at this time corresponded to a little less than the annual cost of seed. *Førlov* was a duty which the peasants had to pay if they renounced their copyhold, and this was normally fixed at three marks.

#### *Clause 7*

We forbid all illegal harbours, for no one is allowed to have a harbour except at the towns, where they always have been, and the merchants shall observe the municipal charter and not collect customs at any other place than the towns. . . .

This was clearly to prevent smuggling outside the approved town harbours where customs were normally collected.



*Clause 8*

It is not allowed to take wreck from any townsmen of these kingdoms, if their ship is wrecked when they sail between these countries.

The Nordic merchants were thus given the right to rescue their ship and cargo, if they were unlucky enough to become stranded while sailing in Nordic waters. Indirectly this supported the Danish merchants who were in competition with the Hanseatic League.

*Clause 9*

Since the king of these three kingdoms has a close friendship with the Hanseatics and the merchants of all countries, men should promote and not hinder these merchants, whether they are on land or at sea. If their ship is wrecked anywhere within the kingdoms, men must help them to rescue their goods and let them enjoy their privileges in this as well as other ways.

This section finally gave the Hanseatic League some hope of enjoying the privileges granted them in the Treaty of Stralsund.

*Clause 10*

We ask and order all officials and fiefholders to live decently with those who are under their rule, according to law, order, justice and moderation, and to protect them better hereafter than they have done before. This they will do—they will answer for this to God and Us—in such a way that they will not strip or violate the fiefs and the royal castles as they have done until now, but settle themselves in each town and give an account of their fief from the first time they are summoned.

Only a strong and respected sovereign could issue such a serious reprimand to the fiefholders for their inadequate fulfilment of their duties. No one could doubt that Queen Margrete would keep a tight rein on her noble fiefholders in future. Combined with the ban on new castle building and the Crown's efforts to reclaim its former properties, the legislation of 1396 must have come as a shock to the powerful aristocracy.

*Clause 11*

No one is allowed to house dealers on his farm or estate. If they do so, the royal officials will stop them and sentence them. No one is

allowed to take peasants or merchants into his service or offer protection to them; he shall let them stay under the Crown and the king, who ought to defend them.

Dealers (*forprangere*) were those who avoided paying customs by illegally buying agricultural products outside the towns, often combining this with the sale of products from the towns. By law all legal trade had to take place in the town market squares. The last part of the section deals with the special relationship between a nobleman and his subordinates; anyone who went into a nobleman's service also came under his protection. This law attempted to prevent peasants and merchants working under the Crown from seeking service elsewhere, perhaps because the Crown had been unable to protect them during times of war.

#### *Clause 12*

No one must receive anything. No one must take or permit anyone else to take anything, and when We order or prohibit anything it shall be done, and he who disobeys will be punished.

This section is difficult to understand and translate, but presumably refers to bribery. Queen Margrete emphasizes that no one will be allowed to ignore an order by paying a bribe to the local authority representing the Crown.

#### *Clause 13*

Since it is unknown whether the Vitalie-brethren intend to stay at sea, We ask and order all noble men (*frelse*) to be ready day and night with their horses and armour, in case they are summoned by Us or the king's officials, either on land or at sea. If any brethren are caught, they shall be sentenced as if they were peace-breakers, because King Albrecht and his men and the Hanseatic League have surrendered them and said they will not help them. He who helps or hides them or acts against this order shall also be punished.

The expression *frelse* refers to the privileged classes—Church and nobility—who were exempt from paying taxes, although this section deals only with the nobility. The nobles paid for exemption with active service in war, and they had to be constantly ready with men, horses and armour.

In principle the raids of the brethren should have been over by this time. The Treaty of Lindholm had explicitly ordered the piracy to end, but it was unlikely that this lucrative business would be stopped so easily. By issuing this warning Queen Margrete hoped the nobles would be prepared, even though the peace would last officially until 1398.

#### *Clause 14*

Anyone summoned to serve the king and country shall leave as he has been ordered, and the king's official must not accept money or gifts instead. The king's officials and the towns shall be prepared to defend the king and country with their ships and those who hold a royal castle must take in supplies and equip the soldiers as well as is necessary. In addition they will guard the beaches around the country now as before, and in case of war the royal officials will help the others on land and at sea.

This section, clearly a continuation of the previous one, deals with the bribery which resulted from the nobility's unwillingness to fight for the king—by bribing the royal official they might avoid active service. The rest deals with general readiness for instant action in case of war.

#### *Clause 15*

It is forbidden to receive money when sentencing a crime. The judge must only pass sentence.

Judges were forbidden to receive bribes from those involved in crime. Queen Margrete clearly found it necessary to emphasize this point, so this type of corruption may have been widespread.

#### *Clause 16*

Since We have heard that there is a great lack of money in all the provinces, We have agreed a special tax (*hjælp*) to issue new coins. In this province We will receive eight Grot from every household in the middle of Lent (March 12th) and four Grot on St. Martin's day (November 11th) if it is necessary. Therefore We order you to collect eight Grot from every household of copyholders in the villages before the middle of Lent, and in each bishopric the local bishop and the royal official shall register and receive the tax on behalf of the king and I.

Presumably the concession to collect this extra tax was granted by the provincial parliaments and not by the royal council, since the legislation from Funen fixes a different tax rate for each parish and a different procedure for payment.

The tax was to be used to coin new money, as the Danish mint had almost come to a halt during the reign of King Valdemar. People were forced to use foreign coins and this led to a great lack of money generally and a considerable loss of revenue for the Crown.

The coinage reforms introduced 20,000 marks in silver. Initially the mint was concentrated in the towns of Lund and Næstved, producing the so-called *witten* as well as a *sterling* after the English model (Fig. 15). Both silver coins bore the name of King Erik and showed a crown on the obverse and a cross on the reverse. There was also the *hulpenning* and a *halvpenning*, after German models. From contemporary sources we know the name of the mintmaster, Gerrit Gozewijnz Comhaer, who had immigrated to Denmark from the Netherlands.

The Hanseatic League was unhappy with the new *sterling*, which in the Nordic kingdoms equalled three *penning* but elsewhere was only worth a little more than two *penning*. At the great market in Scania the royal officials refused to accept the Danish coins and naturally this resulted in a complaint from the Germans about “the payment which is coined in Denmark, since the queen issues the coins for full value, but will not receive them for full.” The criticism seems justified but the *sterling*, which was legally acceptable, was an improvement on the previous miserable copper coins. The coinage reforms should not be underestimated—and at any rate, they brought a good income to the Danish Crown.

### Clause 17

As God has decreed King Erik as your new lord and king in Denmark, he who wishes to have more privileges or exceptions than the law allows must apply to the king and receive it with his allowance.

Finally the proclamation ends with admonitions to obey the new laws. A new royal official and judge named Vendelbo was appointed in Jutland, and Jens Nielsen Løvenbalk was created provincial judge in northern Jutland. Unfortunately the latter proved to be a bad choice, as some years later he was imprisoned for murdering the knight Jens Jenssøn at Clausholm. The case came to trial in Helsingborg

in 1405, when both Jens Løvenbalk and the victim's family were presented to the queen.<sup>2</sup>

The trial resulted in a compromise in which the repentant murderer promised to pay for the celebration of masses for the deceased as well as several pilgrimages for the salvation of his soul. He also paid for a great funeral and made a solemn act of penance by handing over an unsheathed sword to the relatives of the deceased while he "fell on his knees in front of them and asked them to forgive him for the sake of God." To the dead man's sons he had to say: "If I was the best and mightiest knight in Denmark, and you had slain my father in the same way, then I would accept the same penance from you."

This was a most unusual ending for a murder trial, but the queen must have wanted to save Jens Løvenbalk for some unknown reason.

Queen Margrete's legislation from 1396 gives a clear picture of the political strategy which characterized the government during her reign. One of the main aims of the legislation was to drastically reduce the power of the nobility, and it is significant that the laws were issued through the provincial parliaments and not by the royal council. Previously the privileged classes had limited the king's power by the conditions they laid down in the coronation charter, but now in 1396 it was the Crown which set out the almost unlimited power of the new king.

Today, over 600 years later, it is very difficult to judge to what extent the new laws were obeyed. The government and administration controlled the country more tightly than before, but law and order was not restored immediately. As late as 1399 violent incidents could still occur. In accordance with an order from the queen, the bishops of Jutland assembled in the cathedral of Århus in order to mediate in a quarrel between the Bishop of Børglum and the Bishop of Viborg. When the case appeared to be proceeding to the benefit of the latter, the Bishop of Børglum became enraged and called on his armed men outside the church. They broke in and attacked the priest who was in the middle of Mass, and at the same time threw a sword through a window into the room where the bishops were assembled. The Bishop of Viborg escaped at the last

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<sup>2</sup> The trial in Helsingborg: *Danske Domme 1375-1662*. Ud. E. Reitzel-Nielsen 1978. vol. 1, s. 42-47.

moment as the men broke in and seized the documents relating to the case.

Gradually events like these became rare, and the judgement of posterity is expressed in a Norwegian letter of 1414: "When the highborn lady Queen Margrete, daughter of King Valdemar—God save her soul—brought these three kingdoms together under one master and established more peace and tranquillity than they had before, she showed in all manner of ways that she would help all and each to equal rights and justice, strengthen the law and suppress every injustice, for which God reward her."<sup>3</sup>

### *The Nyköping recess in Sweden*

Very similar legislation was issued in connection with the election of Erik as king of Sweden on July 23rd 1396, a ceremony commemorated by an inscription on the traditional coronation stone in Mora. This legislation is called the Nyköping recess, as it was issued after a royal council meeting in Nyköping on September 20th. The document (now in the National Archives in Copenhagen) was written in Swedish and sealed by King Erik, Queen Margrete, the members of the Swedish royal council and a large number of noblemen.<sup>4</sup>

The first clause addresses "all royal fiefholders and officials who have administered the Crown's estates as mortgage or loan since the time of King Albrecht's accession to power," i.e. 1363. All these estates as well as the peasants' farms were to be restored to the Crown *without any form of compensation*. This was in contrast to the Danish legislation and was a particularly harsh decision.

It also stipulated that "if someone has forced or taxed or visited a peasant in such a way that he has had to sell or pawn or give his farm to another," this would be annulled and the farm restored to the Crown within a year.

The following clause noted that all estates taken from the Crown since 1363 would be evaluated at special courts which would judge whether the estate should be restored with compensation to the present holder (where the estate was owned rather than administered).

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<sup>3</sup> Assessments of Queen Margrete: Dipl. N. X, nr. 124, p. 97ff.

<sup>4</sup> The Nyköping Recess: S.T. II, pp. 655–663.

In each jurisdiction these courts were appointed and dated in great detail.

The next two clauses deal with a feud with Knut Bosson who, as son of the long-deceased *drost* Bo Jonsson, demanded an inheritance from the latter's enormous estates. With his mother Margareta Dume—a Mecklenburg woman—he had been summoned to a meeting with the queen, but did not appear. The queen intended to force them to accept Bo Jonsson's will, which cut out the widow and son from a large part of their inheritance. They were ordered to a new meeting, and Queen Margrete threatened to confiscate all their estates without any compensation if they failed to attend.

A concluding clause stipulates that during the lifetime of King Erik and Queen Margrete no one would be allowed to buy, pawn or reduce the property of the Crown without their consent. The first part of the legislation ends here. The Crown's confiscation of estates in Sweden took place on a much larger scale than in Denmark, although several noblemen such as Abraham Brodersen and Jens Svarteskåning were exempted, probably due to their closeness to Queen Margrete.

The recently-ennobled were struck a second blow in the next part of the legislation, which stated that everyone ennobled after 1363 would lose their title unless the king decided otherwise. Those who had been ennobled before 1363 had to prove it within six weeks, so no doubt the courts had plenty to do. This stipulation, which does not exist in the Danish legislation, must have come as a shock to those who had supported the House of Mecklenburg for the last 33 years. Now all was lost unless they could gain the king's favour.

Towns were told that their inhabitants should pay tax according to the municipal charter and it was generally underlined that the royal orders should be obeyed better than previously. As in Denmark no one was permitted to build castles. All fortifications and castles built since King Albrecht came to power were to be pulled down immediately if the king or queen "no longer wished to have them."

One section is of particular interest as it mentions a future meeting of the royal councils of Sweden, Denmark and Norway. At this meeting they were to give assurances that they would never wage war on each other as "we all have one lord and king in these three kingdoms." It is worded with great prudence and clearly refers to the union between Denmark, Sweden and Norway which the queen hoped to bring about in the near future. The meeting in Kalmar

the following year was to be of vital importance for Scandinavian history over the next two centuries.

The Nyköping recess next laid down which areas of Sweden belonged to Queen Margrete's dowry. The *livgeding* constituted the estates and fiefs given to the queen at her wedding and later in order to secure her income after the death of the king. We do not know which estates belonged to her dowry originally as the marriage treaty with King Haakon has not been preserved. She was now granted the provinces of Östergötland and Västergötland, Rumlaborg castle and fief with Jönköping, the bishopric of Skara with its castles and towns, Västerås castle and town, as well as Dalarne, Kopparbergen and Järnbergen. Income from these huge estates would have been considerable, and the queen must have been well satisfied with this grant.

We also have evidence of how she used the rich Swedish iron deposits as a means of payment. On January 21st 1402 the chapter of Roskilde gave the queen a receipt for 2000 marks which she had borrowed, but on condition that in return she gave their bishop, Peder Jensen Lodehat, 2000 so-called *læster* of iron from Sweden.<sup>5</sup> The extraction of iron and copper from the Swedish mountains was a lucrative business during the 14thC.

After settlement of the queen's income came the vital question of the rights of the Church. In March 1396—only six months previously—all the Swedish bishops had assembled in Arboga to complain about the taxes of 1389 and general abuses of power by royal officials and fiefholders. To halt “the unbridled greed and evil of mankind, which in these times grows greater than usual,” the bishops finally resolved to issue a bull of excommunication. This Latin document put the whole country under interdict from July 26th 1396; theoretically it meant no one could have a Christian burial or receive extreme unction.<sup>6</sup>

However it is characteristic that their complaints were directed not at the new king but at unscrupulous officials. The bull was a very useful weapon in the hands of Queen Margrete, who emphasized that confiscation of estates was the result of abuses such as taxes and visits heaped on the peasants. Naturally the solution was to restore

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<sup>5</sup> Letter on Swedish iron: D.M. IV, pp. 355–356.

<sup>6</sup> The letter of interdict: Reuterdaahl, *Statuta Synodalia*, s. 91.



all royal estates and fiefs to the Crown without any compensation!

It is also worth noting that King Erik's election took place only three days before the interdict came into force. The blessing and benevolence of the Church was vital and as a special token of the new king's piety the Church was promised 10,000 silver marks in addition to the sum it had received when Queen Margrete came to power in 1389.

The Nyköping recess ends with the usual long list of all the councillors and noblemen present on the one side and King Erik and Queen Margrete on the other. All declared solemnly that they had entered into the agreement and hung their seals on the document in witness. A letter with two new sections was attached to the recess. The first dealt with accounts between Queen Margrete and several Swedish noblemen who demanded money; this was settled in a friendly manner. The last section acknowledged that "our lady Queen Margrete has often said to us and several other good men, before and now, that neither King Erik nor she would be obliged to hold or fulfil any of the letters issued by King Albrecht" unless individual cases merited royal favour.

In general the Nyköping recess was much more far-reaching than the Danish legislation, and it is significant that the queen was able to force through such radical reform. Margrete was now 43 years old and had reached the height of her power. She had a great talent for negotiation and could manipulate people without being despotic. The majority of Swedish noblemen may have realised the Crown had to be strengthened in order to avoid the widespread disintegration of government which occurred during King Albrecht's reign. But perhaps only a few suspected how far the reforms would encroach upon their own position. The Swedish historian Erik Lönnroth has characterized the recess as "a crushing defeat to the Swedish nobility. It wiped out all the economic and political victories which they had gained. With one stroke the Crown recaptured the losses of half a century and thereby created a solid economic foundation. It took ruthless advantage of its legal and military position." It must be added that according to Swedish law Queen Margrete was within her rights to recommend restoration and the royal council confirmed her decisions.

It is difficult to estimate how many estates were actually restored to the Crown, since we have information only for parts of Västergötland, Västmanland and Uppland. The special courts sat during the

years 1396–7, 1399 and 1409 and in these areas large estates were confiscated. For example, from three districts in Västergötland no less than 96 farms were taken from noblemen and 54 farms from churches and monasteries. If the Swedish bishops had imagined the Church would avoid confiscations, they were disappointed.

The Swedish historian Jerker Rosen analysed how the population was affected by the reforms and found that the old aristocracy was spared to a large extent. Those who were worst hit were officials and citizens of German origin who had become rich during King Albrecht's reign. The family of the deceased *drost* Bo Jonsson was also treated harshly in comparison to other nobles.

It is noteworthy that Queen Margrete had all the trial documents brought to Denmark at a later date. The reforms in Sweden were carried through with a ruthlessness which was not criticised in public until after her death. Initially the accusations were directed against her official Esbjörn Djäken and his men, who "without right or trial" had confiscated estates for the Crown. In the district of Lyring people witnessed in court that he had put a peasant in the pillory for 10 weeks to force him to hand over his land. One can easily imagine that the story improved with telling, but probably his methods were open to criticism.

Five interesting forgeries from the time of the reforms have come to light. All were made on older documents; the original text was carefully removed and replaced by another, and the names, dates and seals of the issuers retained so that the letters appeared genuine. Probably they were made to prove the Crown's right to particular estates and as the handwriting reveals this was done *ca.* 1400 it seems likely they relate to confiscations.

### *The medieval perception of justice*

In general terms the legislation of 1396 must be seen as a major victory for the Crown. The nobility of Denmark and Sweden lost so much influence that a century was to pass before they regained their position. However although the laws largely protected citizens, merchants and peasants from abuse by the nobility, it was not an attempt to abolish the 'God-given' structure of medieval society.

According to medieval philosophy the king ruled through a combination of *justitia* (justice) and *aequitas* (fairness). In return he owed

his subjects peace and protection, with a particular duty of care to the weak such as widows, children, pilgrims, foreigners and the poor. In the prologue to the *Jyske Lov* (Law of Jutland) of 1241, which was still the basis for administering justice in Queen Margrete's time, the medieval concept of society is expressed as follows:

Law shall build the country. But if everyone was content with his own and allowed others to enjoy the same there would be no need for any law . . . The law must be honest and fair, bearable and in accordance with tradition, appropriate and useful and clear, so that everyone can know and understand what the law says. The law must not be made or written to the particular advantage of any man, but secure the interests of all who live in the country. . . . Thus as the Holy Church is ruled by pope and bishop, so each country should be governed and guarded by the king and his officials. . . .

With this last sentence we return to the medieval concept of society, in which every man was born to a particular place. There was a hierarchy in Heaven as there was on earth, and the secular court of justice had a clear parallel in the heavenly court where on the last day Christ would judge the living and the dead. Everyone knew that on the Day of Judgment the clergy and nobility would be measured in the same way as the poor peasant. Colourful paintings in the churches showed devils dragging noblemen, bishops, monks and even popes into the jaws of Hell.

Queen Margrete made no attempt to change the structure of society, although she deprived the nobles of some of their privileges. In contrast to the *Jyske Lov* her legislation was issued in response to specific problems. Nevertheless it revealed the Crown's intention of governing by new rules. The queen even managed to win papal approval for the confiscations. On March 29th 1401 Pope Bonifacius IX gave his blessing to the restoration of all estates taken from the Crown in her three kingdoms.<sup>7</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> The confirmation of Pope Bonifacius IX: S.D. IV, nr. 2864.

## CHAPTER TWELVE

### THE NORDIC UNION 1397

The meeting which was to secure peace throughout Scandinavia was held the following summer in the royal castle of Kalmar, which still preserves some medieval brickwork behind its Renaissance façade. The assembly drew together Danish, Swedish and Norwegian noblemen and clergy, headed by the 44-year-old queen and the young King Erik.

The archbishops of Lund and Uppsala and almost all the Danish and Swedish bishops attended the meeting. However the Norwegian clergy were represented only by the Bishop of the Orkney Islands and the Dean of Oslo, who was also the Norwegian chancellor. The Danish royal council sent 24 noblemen, whereas Sweden and Norway were represented by 13 councillors each. It is remarkable that there were no foreign delegates; this is a pity since we lack a typically detailed Hanseatic report of these important negotiations. The Danish and Swedish annals preserve only brief accounts, although there are of course the results of the meeting itself: the brilliant coronation letter with its confirmation of Erik of Pomerania's election as joint king over the three kingdoms and the so-called union document which sets out in draft the points which constitute the main elements of the Nordic union.<sup>1</sup>

The main event of the meeting was the magnificent coronation itself. On Trinity Sunday, June 17th, Erik was crowned as king of the union by the two archbishops, and after the ceremony he knighted 133 people, in accordance with tradition.

No cost was spared to celebrate the event. After the coronation, the accolades and a procession through the town, it is likely the new knights were given the chance to demonstrate their skills at a great tournament. Of course the festivities also provided an excuse for

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<sup>1</sup> The coronation document and draft for a Union have been published in: *Dipl.D. 4 rk.* vol. VI, nr. 344–345, as well as in: *Den Danske Rigsløvgivning*. Ed. Aage Andersen, Copenhagen 1989, pp. 19–26.

dressing in richly-coloured clothes in the newest fashions and parading ornaments and jewels.

The coronation letter is dated July 13th—almost a month after the event (Plate 11). It was written on parchment and sealed by 67 people in all: two archbishops, ten bishops, five lesser clergy, 46 knights and four esquires from the three Nordic nations. It began by announcing that as the “dearest lord King Erik” had been elected and received as king in Denmark, Sweden and Norway with the “love, good will and confirmation” of the inhabitants, and as this had been done in the name of God, all the above-mentioned persons had crowned him king “over all these three kingdoms.”

Thus it was explicitly stressed that King Erik, from having been king in three separate kingdoms, had now become their joint king. The noblemen swore their oath of obedience to him and promised to administer faithfully the royal castles, fortifications, lands and fiefs which they had or would hold in future from King Erik and Queen Margrete. This oath of obedience was of great importance to the elected king—although of course it could be denounced if he did not fulfil his obligations.

The oath was followed by a long section in which thanks were given on behalf of the kingdoms to Queen Margrete for all her efforts during the past years:

God reward our dear lady Queen Margrete for all her good deeds; she has acted so closely with us in these three kingdoms and governed these kingdoms in such a way, that all we who live and reside in these kingdoms cannot reproach her for anything. God grant her a place in Heaven for what she has done for us and her closeness to us; we thank her for everything.

This declaration seems to suggest that the queen would be excused in any accusations or charges which might be brought against her in the future. But did the proclamation mean that her government was now over? Until now this has been a generally-accepted opinion, based on the fact that King Erik had been crowned as king of the Nordic union. However this is not mentioned in the coronation charter—on the contrary, the noblemen swore faithfully to administer any royal fiefs granted by both King Erik and Queen Margrete, then or in the future.

It should also be remembered that when Queen Margrete ascended the Norwegian throne in 1388, the royal council of Norway had

emphasized that she would retain the right to govern and lead the kingdom during her lifetime, even though she had decided to adopt Erik as king.

The coronation charter ends with the traditional declarations and seals and the date: Kalmar, July 13th, 1397.

This date is very late considering the king had been crowned almost a month before, but this was probably due to extensive negotiations across the summer. These negotiations were intended to agree the legal foundation for the union which was a natural result of Erik's election as joint king. Discussion focussed on the extent and nature of the union, and it may be that a full agreement was never achieved, as the document now referred to as the 'Treaty of Union' cannot be described as a final and valid treaty, but must be considered as a draft (Fig. 16).

The treaty is on paper, not parchment, which was always used for important official documents. There are corrections and insertions, and only 10 of the 17 Nordic councillors (seven from Sweden, six from Denmark and four from Norway) who issued the document actually put their seal underneath. These were not the hanging seals which would be required in an official treaty of such importance. There are also questions over the exact date, since the Day of St. Margrete mentioned could be either the 13th or the 20th of July.

However before discussing the nature of the document, I will consider the treaty's clauses separately. After a long introduction in which the councillors announce that after the decision of the royal councils and with "the advice, approval and consent of Queen Margrete" they have crowned Erik as their joint king, they declare that they have "negotiated and entered an eternal and unswerving agreement, peace and treaty."

Nine clauses then follow in no apparent order. The first deals with the royal succession. The starting point is the situation after King Erik's death, and it is emphasized that "one king and no others should be elected to govern all three kingdoms, and thus the kingdoms will never be parted again with the will of God." If the king had one or several sons his successor should be appointed from among them, but if he had only daughters the new king should be elected from among their sons. Finally if the king died without children, the three councils should point out the man whom they considered most suitable.

This stipulation ensured that the Nordic union would be ruled by an elected king. Although the successor was to be chosen from the royal family, it was the three councils who would appoint him and thus in some measure control his government. Queen Margrete may not have been entirely pleased with this decision, but traditionally it was only Norway which had a hereditary monarchy.

It should be noted that in every way the treaty and the coronation of King Erik was a blatant violation of the Lindholm Treaty, which left the former King Albrecht with his royal title at least until the deadline fixed for his ransom payment or the surrender of Stockholm in the following year, 1398.

The next two clauses concern the future relationship of the three kingdoms, underlining that "they shall remain in concordance and love, so that none of them shall depart from the other in dissension or disunion." They were to aid each other in case of war. However as regards domestic policy it was strongly emphasized that "there should not be any law or justice transferred from one kingdom to the other," and the king was obliged to govern the castles, fiefs and jurisdictions according to the laws of each kingdom. In contrast to the first clause this points in quite a different direction, which seems to reflect the councillors' fear of a totally integrated kingdom in which the king's power would be almost total and therefore beyond control. It was clearly important to them that King Erik's government of the union would be founded on the separate laws of each kingdom.

The next clause largely follows on from this. It reiterates that the kingdoms are obliged to help each other in case of war, when "the king, or his officials on his behalf, summons them." The king was to be responsible for "payment, salaries, damage or captivity" relating to mercenaries and his officials were to provide supplies for troops in such a way that "the country and the peasants will not be destroyed." The clause ends with an interesting statement which once again points to the conflicting interests which must have characterized negotiations: "We have all agreed and consented that each shall help the other and travel to the kingdom where it is needed, because all three kingdoms now are and shall remain under one lord and king and be like one kingdom."

This could hardly be in sharper contrast to the previous clause, which had underlined the independence of the kingdoms several

times. The agreement seems rather artificial, and obviously there were great difficulties with the wording of the text.

The next clause contains no specific points but declares formally that the three kingdoms shall have no fights or conflicts hereafter. The statement that the kingdoms shall become like one kingdom under one king is repeated again and followed by a general admonition that "every man, high or low, shall remain under law and justice and be content with this and not oppress or injure anyone less powerful whether by conflict, injustice or encroachment."

The sixth clause states more specifically that if a criminal or outlaw fled to one of the other kingdoms, he should be outlawed there as well, and no one was allowed to shelter or defend him. This seems to be a logical consequence of the union.

This is followed by a clause on foreign policy which stated that the king would have full authority to make decisions on behalf of the three kingdoms, irrelevant of his residence but with the consent of the councillors then present. Foreign policy was traditionally made by the king, so this cannot be regarded as a victory for the Crown. He required the royal council's consent to go to war, but it is unlikely that the clause refers to this.

Injunctions to respect the above articles precede a long final clause dealing with Queen Margrete's estates in Denmark, Sweden and Norway. She was granted full rights for the remainder of her life to "govern, hold, administer and keep" all the estates which her father King Valdemar and her son King Oluf had given her in Denmark, as well as the estates which were part of her dowry (*morgengave*) in Sweden and Norway. She was granted the same unlimited rights over estates "which the noble men in Sweden had agreed with her that she should keep," as well as Norwegian estates which King Haakon and King Oluf had given her. After the queen's death the fiefs and castles were to return to the Crown "except the money and estates which she might give away in her will."

Queen Margrete was thus given a free hand in the numerous estates and fiefs which she had acquired in various ways. As noted previously, we have no exact knowledge of the location and size of these estates, with the exception of Sweden where her dowry had been defined by the Nyköping recess. In Norway she appears to have received the south-eastern part of the country as a wedding present, but this is only a guess since her marriage treaty of 1359 has been lost. Her estates and fiefs in Denmark were *ipso facto* not



part of her dowry, but King Valdemar and King Oluf probably granted her several estates which are now impossible to identify. The queen's role as regent of the kingdom was strongly connected to her private transactions.

The treaty concludes with the stipulation that six letters on parchment with a copy of all the clauses should be issued, "two to each kingdom," to be sealed by the king, Queen Margrete, the royal councils and the towns. However, as mentioned above, only ten of the 17 Nordic councillors who issued the document also sealed it.

### *Discussion*

What is the explanation of the incomplete nature of the treaty? Can its validity be doubted because the final document was never issued? Is the document no more than the rejected draft of a union treaty which was never confirmed?

These questions have sparked lively debate among Nordic historians. Kai Hørby remarked that "the union letter has been given an importance inversely proportional to its formal defects," but on the other hand it is a fact that the document did actually form the basis of the Nordic union.<sup>2</sup> Nearly 30 years later a so-called *vidisse* was issued—a testified copy of the document—and there is no doubt that it was considered valid. The stipulations made in the document were the basis of all later negotiations.

In discussions about the figures behind the union document, much attention has been paid to the ten seals on the paper, which are now very difficult to identify.<sup>3</sup> Previously it was agreed that seven

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<sup>2</sup> Kai Hørby. "Kalmarunionens stadsret", s. 1–11 i *Profiler i nordisk senmiddelalder og renaissance*.

Festskrift til P. Enemark 1983.

<sup>3</sup> The 10 seals can be identified as:

Archbishop Jacob of Lund.

Archbishop Henrik of Uppsala.

Bishop Peder Lodehat of Roskilde.

The Bishop of Arhus or Linköping?

Sten Bengtsson.

Algot Magnusson.

Karl Ulvsson of Tofta.

Jens Andersen Brok eller Ture Bengtsson?

Eringisle Nilsson?

Swedish and three Danish noblemen had sealed the letter, and this led Norwegian historians to conclude that "a zealous and jealous guard over the independence of Norway had caused this result." However the idea that the treaty was dropped because of Norwegian resistance is not very likely and new analysis has shown that at least one of the seals could be Norwegian.<sup>4</sup>

Opinion also differs on whether the document can be seen as a success for the queen. The Swedish historian Erik Lönnroth has claimed that to a large degree it represents the interests of the nobility, and thus he regards it as a victory for Queen Margrete that the official letters on parchment were never written, although the coronation signalled that the union was acknowledged as a fact by all three kingdoms. For Lönnroth the negotiations represent a fight between two different political systems. Queen Margrete tried to achieve a so-called *regimen regale*, which aimed to enlarge the political power and influence of the Crown to the utmost, whereas the Nordic councillors struggled for a *regimen politicum* which would secure the interests of the nobility.

Much has been said and written about the union document, but rather than rehearsing all the differing points of view I will outline my own opinion on the events in Kalmar in 1397.

The coronation of Erik as joint king of Denmark, Sweden and Norway was the main purpose of the great gathering. References to the meeting in the Nyköping recess underline that people expected agreements of far-reaching importance for the future relationship between the Nordic countries. Clauses in the recess on the confiscation of Crown land in Sweden and Denmark, which came into effect just before the meeting in Kalmar, must have served as a warning of the Crown's ambitions. Although the laws of the kingdoms had been confirmed by the royal councils, there must have been widespread concern among the noblemen. The natural reaction was a pronounced effort to hold back, in an attempt to halt further inroads into their privileges and to create a stronger position against the Crown.

These considerations must have characterized the discussions at Kalmar, and this explains the contradictory clauses in the document.

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<sup>4</sup> Niels Skyum-Nielsen: "Et videnskabeligt falsum i debatten om Kalmarunionen". Scandia XXVI, 1960.

On the one hand Queen Margrete tried to set out that the three kingdoms "should remain under one lord and king and be as one kingdom," while the nobles on the other hand tried to secure self-government for each country and thereby hinder "any law and justice from being transferred from one kingdom to the other."

The union document cannot be seen as a legal treaty. Instead it bears witness to negotiations in which the participants failed to reach an agreement but achieved a kind of compromise—which was then put aside by Queen Margrete. Without confirmation by officially sealed documents it would be easy to bypass the stipulations of the treaty and instead emphasize the strong support offered to the Crown in the coronation charter. Nevertheless the document was deposited in the royal archives in Kalundborg and was regarded by posterity as the basis for the union.

The meeting in Kalmar in 1397 is perhaps best judged as an indirect victory for Queen Margrete. She secured the support of the nobility during the negotiations, but founded the Nordic union without binding the Crown to the conditions they laid down.

## CHAPTER THIRTEEN

### THE STRUGGLE FOR GOTLAND AND THE FINAL SURRENDER OF STOCKHOLM

The Lindholm treaty required peace to be maintained on land and at sea for a three-year period until King Albrecht either paid his ransom or surrendered Stockholm, but this was not observed by any of the parties. King Albrecht still hoped to regain Sweden and tried to summon the noblemen of northern Germany to a new war. The 'Vitalie-brethren'—who under the terms of treaty should have stopped their Baltic raiding—continued to plunder the Nordic seas even though the harbours of Wismar and Rostock had been closed to them. They had chosen as their new base the town of Visby on the island of Gotland, from where they could control the northern part of the Baltic.

The Lindholm treaty had divided the island so that King Albrecht controlled Visby and Queen Margrete retained control over the rest of the island. The choice of the nobleman Sven Sture as royal official and commander of the queen's troops on the island proved to be a serious misjudgement. There were well-founded complaints over his private plundering and when Erik, King Albrecht's son, sailed to Gotland in 1396 with a large contingent of soldiers, Sven Sture deserted the queen and surrendered the entire island to the Mecklenburgs. In this way King Albrecht and his son (who already called himself King of Sweden) gained an important territorial base. They had greatly improved their position since their desperate situation when the Lindholm treaty was issued.

Taking advantage of their change of fortune, the Mecklenburgs planned a great attack on Stockholm. At the same time as the Nordic noblemen were assembling in Kalmar to witness the coronation of Erik of Pomerania as King of Denmark, Sweden and Norway, a fleet of 42 ships with 1200 armed men sailed from Visby for Stockholm.

However the Hanseatic League had been warned and the town was prepared to meet the enemy. Hanseatic records reveal what happened when the ships reached the town. The captain of the royal castle and the town councillors received letters demanding that pro-

visions be sent to the fleet. When this demand was rejected the Mecklenburgs sent delegates to request a meeting, and as a result the two sides met to negotiate on a small island outside Stockholm. The Germans demanded free access to the town. This was of course rejected, as was their repeated demand for food supplies. Eventually the Mecklenburg party asked for permission to buy what they needed in the town, but the League considered even this to be far too risky. As it was practically impossible to take Stockholm by force, the great fleet had to sail away without having accomplished anything.

Warning of the fleet's arrival was given by a priest to one of the Hanseatic representatives on the council called Albert Russe.<sup>1</sup> At first the priest had asked cautiously if the castle was guarded well enough. Albert Russe relates: "Then I said to him, 'Dear friend, if you have heard of any evil, then tell me.' Then he answered that he was not allowed to tell anything. And he kneeled down and put two fingers on the floor and said, 'By this stone I swear—God and the saints help me—that Stockholm has been betrayed,' and he raised his arms to Heaven and said, 'May God help me in my last hour. It is true what I have told you.' But he would not tell us any more."

It was enough, and the League had time to prepare the town's defences. It was another disappointment for the Mecklenburgs, and once again their luck failed them. Erik, the son of King Albrecht, died suddenly in Visby, and his widow handed over command of the island to Sven Sture.

### *The meeting in Lübeck*

King Albrecht's hopes of regaining Sweden were fading despite his desperate attempts to raise money and men. Shortly after the coronation of King Erik in Kalmar, King Albrecht sent his chancellor and a nobleman called Helmich van Plessen to a meeting in Lübeck, at which they delivered a long list of complaints against Queen Margrete and her violations of the Lindholm treaty.<sup>2</sup>

The first was that "she would not seal the letters which had been negotiated." This probably referred to the clauses on Stockholm

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<sup>1</sup> The account of Albert Russe: H.R. IV, nr. 410.

<sup>2</sup> The Hanseatic meeting in Lübeck September 8th 1397: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. VI, nr. 368.

remaining in the hands of the League until 1398. Apparently the queen had sealed only part of the treaty, but had given assurances that a proper document would be issued and sealed later.

Secondly they complained that “some of his (Albrecht’s) subordinates had been executed,” and thirdly that “some of the queen’s men from Kalmar and elsewhere had wanted to conquer Visby.” This was impudent to say the least since thanks to Sven Sture’s treason the Mecklenburgs held the whole island—and had also tried to take Stockholm.

Last but not least they complained “that she had a king crowned in Sweden and thereby robbed him of his royal title,” in violation of all agreements. This accusation was fair, since the treaty had secured King Albrecht’s royal status until the end of the deadline in 1398.

After accusing the queen of violating the peace, King Albrecht’s delegates appealed to the Hanseatic League for help and asked them to arrange a meeting with Queen Margrete.

The League replied that the unsealed letters had been discussed before, as had the allegation over the execution of Albrecht’s subordinates. They knew nothing of any Danish attack on Visby and were therefore unable to answer that point. To the request for their help they righteously stressed that “if they were to give help against anyone, it ought to be against those who had harmed the merchants, and Albrecht knew well to whom they referred.”

Innocent merchants had been robbed by the ‘Vitalie-brethren,’ so the League had no reason to help. They were unwilling even to arrange a meeting, for the king was quite capable of doing this himself, they said, since by the grace of God he was sound and healthy and had many knights and men. Eventually they promised to write to the queen on the matter. Her half-hearted attempts to fight the pirates had caused some irritation among the merchants, particularly as the League’s ‘peace-ships’ had been equipped and manned at great expense. Following an incident in the summer of 1396 the League refused to equip any more ships.

Off the southern coast of Gotland, German ships had encountered a Swedish ship from Kalmar sent out to fight the pirates. Thinking they were brethren, the Germans attacked and took the ship. The crew were thrown into the water and the ship itself was set on fire. The Swedes were outraged by this incident and Queen Margrete sent a sharp complaint to the Grand Master of the Teutonic

Order. However the German captain insisted the Swedish ship had been a pirate vessel and the dispute continued.

*The Teutonic Order takes Gotland*

Since the League had stopped equipping 'peace-ships' and Queen Margrete was occupied with important negotiations over the Nordic Union, the brethren had a relatively free hand in the Baltic. Gotland became a threat to the peace of the entire region, and in the spring of 1398 the Teutonic Order's Grand Master Konrad von Jungingen decided to undertake a military campaign to halt the pirates. A great fleet with an army of 4000 men sailed to Gotland and after two weeks of fighting the whole island including Visby was in the hands of the Grand Master. Sven Sture escaped with 400 of the brethren. This defeat signalled the final end of the Mecklenburg reign.

Queen Margrete probably received the news of the occupation of Gotland with mixed feelings. The pirates had been expelled, but could she trust assurances that the campaign had only been undertaken in order to protect the merchants and secure peace in the Baltic?

Potentially the Teutonic Order was a far more dangerous enemy than the 'Vitalie-brethren', and it was extremely uncertain whether the Grand Master would be willing to hand over the island, although it belonged to Sweden. Visby was extremely important for trade in the region, and it would be of great value to the Order to control this economic centre.

There was good reason for concern. The German occupation of the island was to last ten years, until 1407. But circumstances made it impossible for Queen Margrete to intervene initially; the Treaty of Lindholm was about to expire. According to this agreement King Albrecht had to pay a ransom of 60,000 marks before the deadline of September 29th 1398, but no-one believed such a sum could be raised in just three years. Time was running out, and in August Queen Margrete summoned the Hanseatic League delegates to a meeting in Copenhagen.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>3</sup> Negotiations in Copenhagen: August 1st 1398: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. VI, nr. 611–612.

Here she emphasized that they would neither have their privileges confirmed nor receive any compensation until the matter of Stockholm was resolved. Wulf Wulfram of Stralsund was sent to Mecklenburg with the message that unless King Albrecht told the League before August 24th whether he intended to pay the ransom, they would have to surrender Stockholm to the queen. In a rather helpless reply King Albrecht told them that he had received the letter but hoped for help from his friends, and asked them to think the best of him.

With such an answer the League had no choice. The well-informed Lübeck chronicler tells us that, “since they were unable to get any other answer from him, they kept their promise as pious people and surrendered the town and the castle to the queen the following day of St. Michael (September 29th). Thus King Albrecht lost his kingdom.”<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>4</sup> The Lübeck Chronicle on Stockholm: Ed. Grautoff, p. 386.



## CHAPTER FOURTEEN

### STATE AND CHURCH

During the Middle Ages the Catholic Church played a very different role both politically and economically from today's Church. It was responsible for all education and hospitals and the bishops, led by the Archbishop of Lund, were permanent members of the royal council with a major influence on domestic and foreign policy. The Church was also an economic power thanks to the large estates owned by the monasteries and the bishops. These estates were tax-exempt and the Church had considerable income from tithes as well as gifts by will.

As noted previously, the Church could almost be regarded as an independent state within the kingdom. In reality however the changing popes on the throne of St. Peter were very much dependent on the secular powers. The corruption attached to the appointment of bishops and the filling of various church offices reached a climax during the 'Great Schism.'

This term is used to characterize the period from 1378–1417 which saw the crisis of the papal split between Rome and Avignon. Since 1309 the popes had lived in Avignon in southern France, where they had built up a well-organised financial establishment. But popular demand gradually arose for the return of the popes to Rome. The holy Birgitta was one of the leading forces in this movement, and her efforts to persuade the pope were indefatigable. Gregory XI was told of one of her revelations in which Christ, through Birgitta, had demanded his return to Rome—and if he failed to “then all the devils of Hell will have a piece of your soul, even though it is immortal and incorruptible, and instead of blessings you will be filled with eternal curses.”<sup>1</sup>

In 1377 the pope decided to move the Curia and the papal court to Rome, but after his death in 1378 further conflict arose. Urban

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<sup>1</sup> The revelations of St. Birgitta 1373, translated from: Johanne Skovgaard: *Den hellige Birgitta*, s. 166.

VI was elected as his successor following great dispute among the cardinals, and the disagreements resulted in the election of a new pope, Clement VII, who established a separate papal court in Avignon with the support of the French cardinals.

Thus the unhappy split within the Church became reality. The popes cursed each other, and the European kingdoms now had to face the problem of which pope they would support. Political structures and alliances were the deciding factors; France, Spain, Scotland and Naples supported the pope in Avignon, whereas England, the Holy German Empire, the greater part of Italy and the Scandinavian kingdoms supported Urban VI in Rome.

Like her father, Queen Margrete maintained an excellent relationship with the papacy, and with the help of clever advocates and frequent gifts she managed to control appointments to all the important church offices in the Nordic countries. In return she ensured Danish, Swedish and Norwegian support for the Roman popes and granted the shameless papal tax-collectors a free hand. Unfortunately no letters have been preserved from the time of Urban VI, but we know he confirmed the election of Magnus Nielsen as Archbishop of Lund.

I have already mentioned Queen Margrete's coup of 1382, in which the canon of Roskilde, Peder Jensen Lodehat, was nominated as Bishop of Vexjö in Sweden in place of the candidate appointed by the chapter. This was a significant achievement, as Albrecht was still king in Sweden at the time. In the same year similar circumstances surrounded the appointment of the new Archbishop of Trondheim in Norway. In this case the chapter had also elected a successor, and the canon travelled to Rome to have his appointment confirmed by the pope. However Queen Margrete forestalled them by having Pope Urban VI sanction a Danish nobleman, the canon Niels Finkenow, nicknamed Rusere.

These appointments no doubt led to great dissatisfaction among the clergy over the open corruption of the papal court and the royal abuse of power. Faithful supporters of the Crown were placed in bishoprics as soon as they became vacant. Thus Peder Jensen Lodehat was transferred to Århus in 1386; two years later Tetz Podebusk, a son of the *drost*, was appointed Bishop of Odense, and from 1389 Bishop Eskil administered the bishopric of Ribe.

The death of Urban VI on October 15th 1389 did not result in any change in papal policy towards Denmark; his successor Boniface IX (1389–1404) was even more sympathetic towards the queen. The

day after Urban's death his cardinals sent the news to the queen and asked her to pray for his soul and for the well-being of the Church. Both must have been urgent, as the late pope's government had been characterized by much brutality. Rumours of his misdeeds reached even the Nordic countries, and in the cathedral of Åbo a book has been preserved which contains a copy of a letter from the King of Naples, Karl of Durazzo, relating the cruel fate of some of the cardinals.<sup>2</sup> After discovering that they had tried to limit his power, the pope had them imprisoned. They were taken to a remote castle where they were tortured; five of them were actually murdered.

The pontificate of his successor Boniface IX went off more peacefully, but corruption spread swiftly due to his spendthrift nature. Given ample payment, the pope was willing to grant almost any favour, and a broad stream of applications and money flowed to Rome. One way of getting money was through the jubilee indulgence which promised forgiveness of all sins and escape from Purgatory and Hell. In a fine distinction, money was not paid to obtain forgiveness for sins, but instead constituted the sum which a repentant sinner could pay instead of performing the hard penance laid upon him. This system of payment was soon corrupted. The jubilee indulgence was distributed to pilgrims who travelled to Rome and visited holy sites in a particular year. Originally the interval between the great jubilees was 100 years, but the popes changed this to 60 and then 33 years because of the huge income derived from the many pilgrims. Eventually the pope decided to give certain churches outside Rome permission to distribute the indulgence as well, thus ensuring that many more people would benefit from it—as would papal income.

1390 was one of these jubilee years and the recently-elected Archbishop of Lund, Peder Jensen, travelled to Rome to have his appointment confirmed by the new pope. He took with him a letter from Queen Margrete to which Pope Boniface IX wrote an interesting reply, dated October 15th.<sup>3</sup> He began by thanking the queen in an elaborate and florid style for her letters and presents, promising to be at her service in every way. Queen Margrete had

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<sup>2</sup> The "Svartbok" from Åbo cathedral, nr. 255–256.

<sup>3</sup> Bonifacius IX's letter to Queen Margrete October 10th 1390: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 4, nr. 281. The name of the new Archbishop of Lund should not be confused with Peder Jensen Lodehat, bishop in Århus.

apparently referred to the good relations between her father King Valdemar and the papal see, to which the pope replied that “even though her ancestors had won great favour, he would grant her still more.” With his letter he sent her a secret seal which she was to use for confidential letters. Unfortunately we know nothing of this private correspondence between Boniface IX and Queen Margrete, but it is likely she used the seal often.

### *The canonisation of St. Birgitta*

The pope kept his promise. The canonisation of the holy Birgitta in 1391 was proof of his great benevolence, and a success for which Queen Margrete’s representatives at the papal court had worked for many years. The Order of St. Birgitta (the *Ordo Sanctissimi Salvatoris*, which had been approved since 1370) was to prove widely popular. The canonisation was celebrated on October 7th and 8th 1391, and this great event deserves some attention.

The mother convent of the order in Vadstena, Sweden, sent the nobleman Magnus Persson (later their confessor-general) as well as a certain Lars Romer as their official representatives. Lars Romer later wrote a detailed description of the celebrations.<sup>4</sup>

The ceremonies were very elaborate and showed a degree of splendour which took the representatives by surprise. The festivities began on the evening of Friday October 6th when the bells of St. Peter pealed from 7–10 p.m. with all the other great bells in Rome. During these special days a full indulgence was granted to everyone who visited the papal palace and the cathedral of St. Peter. On Saturday morning after celebrating Mass, the pope walked in solemn procession through the papal palace followed by all his cardinals. A great banquet followed, at which the pope was the guest of Magnus Persson. The menu had been ordered from the papal kitchens and the dishes included “a one-year-old calf, fed from fresh mother’s milk.” In the evening ceremonies took place in St. Peter’s, which was “decorated with olive leaves and branches and beautifully illuminated with torches and candles, especially around the high altar. The pope started to

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<sup>4</sup> Lars Romers’ account of St. Birgitta’s canonisation, translated from: Johanne Skovgaard: *Den hellige Birgitta*, s. 185–203.

sing the evening prayers for St. Birgitta, and at the same time all the candles on the altars were lit as well as five thousand lamps in the cathedral, both outside and inside, and the entire church looked as if it was on fire." The celebrations continued during Sunday with masses and processions and finally, after the pope had blessed the whole crowd, a magnificent dinner was held at the French cardinal's house. Lars Romer gave an enthusiastic account of all the dishes, and his description of the dinner's culmination deserves to be given verbatim:

Finally there were placed great precious bowls of gold in front of master Adam, the Cardinal of England, who was the eldest and most dignified of the cardinals, and among these there was a bowl with a meat pasty, beautifully decorated on the outside; and when it was cut up before his eyes, and the upper part was removed, it showed itself to be full of little birds, which flew out as soon as they sensed freedom, to the great amusement of all those present.

For Lars Romers the birds, formerly imprisoned but now free to fly out to the woods, could be likened to the souls that on the day of St. Birgitta's canonization were freed from Purgatory to fly up to God.

International recognition of the Order of St. Birgitta was followed by widespread popular success, and the Vadstena convent soon became a shrine for pilgrims from all the Nordic countries (Fig. 20). In 1393 the pope granted these pilgrims the same indulgence which they would have received by visiting Rome in the jubilee year of 1390, and he also allowed the convent to keep half the income from the indulgences, with the rest being sent to Rome.<sup>5</sup>

### *The Order of St. Birgitta*

In contrast to the Benedictines, the Cistercians and the mendicant friars, the Order of St. Birgitta received both nuns and monks in the same convent. These 'double convents' admitted up to 60 sisters. The male members were to consist of 13 ordained monks, four 'mass deacons' and eight lay brothers. The sexes lived strictly separated from each other, although the church itself was common. The abbess held supreme authority over both nuns and monks, and thus

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<sup>5</sup> The Vadstena convent is permitted to give indulgences, 1393: A.P.D., nr. R45.

particular prestige was attached to the women. Even though the Bridgittines were supposed to live in strict asceticism, obey a vow of poverty and observe 'eternal silence' for most of the day, it was not a closed order. Sermons held in the native tongue drew large crowds of people; St. Birgitta had advised that "those who preach should use few and plain words in such a way that the people, who come from great distances, can understand them and not be bored by too many superfluous and artificial words."

The mother convent of Vadstena was not only a religious but a political centre, which became a rallying-ground for opposition to King Albrecht. During her lifetime St. Birgitta had been deeply engaged in political affairs and after her death in 1373 the Order maintained its political influence in Sweden. Queen Margrete's close connections to the Vadstena convent and the family of St. Birgitta had great relevance for her assumption of power in Sweden. Her lady of the court at Akershus castle had been Merete Ulvsdatter, a daughter of St. Birgitta, who had brought up the child-queen with her own daughter Ingegerd Knutsdatter. Ingegerd was elected as the first abbess of Vadstena in 1384. Margrete and Ingegerd remained friends all their lives and during the ruthless confiscations in Sweden the abbess was sharply criticised for her support of the queen. In 1403 Ingegerd Knutsdatter was dismissed after an internal dispute in the convent, but she remained in Vadstena as an ordinary nun until her death.

Throughout her life Queen Margrete showed a special benevolence towards the Order of St. Birgitta and when Katharina, the sister of Erik of Pomerania, came to Denmark as a little girl, she was received into the Order despite being only six years old.<sup>6</sup> In 1403 the queen herself was received into the Order when she spent Christmas and New Year at Vadstena. The annals of the convent relate how she summoned all the sisters and brothers before her departure and kissed their hands. Out of respect for the queen one of the brothers wrapped his hand in his cowl, but Margrete said, "No, not like that, give me your hand unwrapped, since I have become your sister now."<sup>7</sup>

Probably the queen's admission to the Order was only a *pro forma* gesture which did not influence her political life. However there can

<sup>6</sup> Katharina is received in Vadstena: Dipl. N. VI, 401.

<sup>7</sup> Queen Margrete is received in Vadstena: S.R.S. 1, 1 116 f.

be no doubt that her religious conviction was sincere. Although her policy towards the Church was quite ruthless and took every advantage of corruption at the papal court, she gave many gifts and donations to churches and monasteries. The founding of the Bridgettine convent in Maribo in Denmark was a token of the enthusiasm, although she did not live to see the convent's consecration (Fig. 22). In 1416 King Erik granted a municipal charter to a town near the convent. Today the beautiful church is used as a cathedral and only ruins remain of the other convent buildings.<sup>8</sup>

According to the records at Vadstena Queen Margrete once had "a confidential talk with some of the monks. She told them about a woman who had been in great agony, but had been given a revelation from St. Birgitta, who had said, 'Love the brethren in Vadstena and you will be delivered from all this.' And the queen added, 'Some time I will tell you the name of this woman,' but the brethren understood that she referred to herself."<sup>9</sup>

Like all such anecdotes this should be read with reservations, but it gives an impression of the spiritual mysticism which characterized the late Middle Ages. Worship of the Virgin Mary as a mild and compassionate intercessor on the Day of Judgement occasionally overshadowed even the worship of Christ. It seems Queen Margrete was seized by these feelings as well, since the greater part of her donations for memorial masses explicitly mention worship of the holy Virgin.

At the end of the year 1385 Queen Margrete appears to have gone on a pilgrimage to Aachen.<sup>10</sup> This famous shrine displayed some of the most well-known relics in Europe, which were placed in the magnificent reliquary of the Virgin. Here her dress was kept, as well as the wrap of the infant Jesus, the cloth which had contained the head of John the Baptist and the loincloth of Christ. At the time of the queen's visit a great new Gothic choir was being built onto Charlemagne's magnificent octagonal church of 805, where the German kings and emperors had been crowned since 936. It was thus an extremely old site even in Queen Margrete's time and

<sup>8</sup> The founding of a convent in Maribo 1408: N.D.M. V,5. VI,224. Æ.A.III, 259, 267, 293.

<sup>9</sup> The queens visit in Vadstena: S.R.S. I, 132.

<sup>10</sup> E.R. Dacnell: "Om en hidtil upaagtet Rejse til Aachen af Dronning Margrethe i 1385." H.T., 7. rk, 3 vol. s. 190-194.

pilgrims from all over Europe travelled to Aachen to worship the relics. The only references to the queen's pilgrimage are to be found in the chronicles of Dortmund and Münster, which relate that the queen passed through the towns in 1385 on her way to Aachen. It was said that some years later she planned to go on pilgrimage to Rome in the jubilee year of 1390, but this journey was cancelled.

### *The Swedish Church*

The conquest of Sweden resulted in a change in the queen's policy towards the Church. While the Swedish noblemen willingly joined her party against the detested House of Mecklenburg, the Swedish clergy was much more reserved. Her manipulation of the appointment of bishops in Denmark sparked a well-founded fear that she would conduct the same policy in Sweden. However the Church's support was essential and in the autumn of 1389 the queen promised 10,000 marks in silver to the Swedish cathedrals, churches and monasteries. As already noted this sum was equivalent to the total annual income of the Swedish Church. Also in the price of support was her promise to appoint only native Swedes as bishops.

The queen's share in the canonisation of St. Birgitta undoubtedly brought her great prestige in Sweden. She was also very interested in missionary work among the Laplanders, and encouraged the Archbishop of Uppsala to promote the mission in Finmarken and Lapland. It was not long before she felt her position was strong enough to bypass the assurances she had given to the Church.

During the weak reign of King Albrecht lawlessness in Sweden had escalated. Criminals could even be found among the clergy, but they could not be sentenced according to secular laws and had to be reported to Rome. The following example gives a good idea of the situation.

A monk named Johannes Jul, from the monastery of the Order of St. John in Eskilstuna, had been invited by his prior to a party in a local inn. When he arrived he found his prior in drinking-bout with a crowd of local people. They asked him to join in, but some words he exchanged with a woman caused a great fuss. A furrier jumped up and grasped an axe which he raised in anger over the monk. At the last moment the infuriated monk managed to wrest the axe from his hand and dealt the furrier a hard blow. The unfor-



fortunate man died six weeks later and Johannes Jul tried desperately to insist that he was not guilty of his death. He must have argued well, as the pope allowed him to remain in the Order of St. John, although he was transferred to another monastery.<sup>11</sup>

In another case a parish priest in the bishopric of Linköping, Johannes Karoli, had attended a big wedding party. A fight between two families had developed into a general scuffle and in order to defend his nephew the priest had struck down one of his adversaries with a knife.

These episodes give a clear picture of conditions at the time. There was real reason for concern and following the Lindholm treaty of 1395 the leaders of the Swedish Church held a provincial council in Arboga during Lent 1396. Here the bishops agreed on a bull of excommunication.<sup>12</sup> The statute of the synod was divided into ten sections, five of which dealt with the extraordinary regulations required by the disturbances in the country. One section ordered a special fast for those who had committed murder on a Sunday, Friday or Saturday, while another excluded pirates and other robbers from the hope of Christian burial unless they returned what they had robbed.

However the threat of the interdict was never realized, for in the meantime the Church received promises of compensation. The recess of Nyköping gave security that the Church could regain estates unjustly usurped by greedy landowners during King Albrecht's reign. In addition Queen Margrete promised an additional donation of 10,000 marks and with this the Church had to be satisfied.

### *The queen's policy towards the Church*

When the Roman Pope Boniface IX died in 1404, the queen lost a very useful support for her policy towards the Church. Among the many privileges, exceptions and orders which the pope had issued in 1401 concerning the Nordic countries, there are several interesting examples of his favouritism.<sup>13</sup> One letter granted the queen papal permission to confiscate all the estates taken from the Crown in her

<sup>11</sup> A murder and the monk from Eskilstuna: S.D. n. 2986.

<sup>12</sup> The Swedish letter of condemnation 1396: Statuta synodalia. Ed. H. Reuterdaahl, pp. 91–100.

<sup>13</sup> Papal letters from 1401 (all March 29th): A.P.D. nr. 993–99.

three kingdoms. This referred to the transactions arising from the law of 1396, for which the queen wanted papal approval.

Another letter granted the three Nordic archbishops permission to give the same indulgence to those defending the kingdoms of Queen Margrete as that given to the defenders of the Holy Land. In this way Queen Margrete bestowed an almost holy aura on the Nordic Union, and no doubt she recognised the usefulness of possessing such a document.

Innocent VII, the successor of Boniface IX, was pope for only two years. After his death in 1406 the Great Schism entered a new phase. The cardinals elected a new pope, the learned 75-year-old Gregory XII, on condition that as soon as the pope in Avignon died, he would retire of his own free will and the two cardinal colleges of Rome and Avignon would choose one pope and thereby dissolve the unhappy schism.

Events turned out quite differently. Internal struggles in both Rome and Avignon resulted in a meeting in Pisa in 1409 at which a majority of the cardinals deposed both popes, who were accused as heretics, and elected a new pope with the name of Alexander V. Neither the pope in Avignon nor the pope in Rome accepted their deposition, so now there were three popes. To complicate the situation still further, Alexander V died the next year and was followed by the unscrupulous John XXIII. Because the queen had established her own group of diplomats in Rome who worked to support her policies, the Nordic countries continued to support the Roman popes until 1410.

One of the most significant episodes resulting from Queen Margrete's policies began with the death of the Swedish archbishop on March 20th 1408. The Swedish clergy were well aware that the queen would exploit every opportunity to place one of her own candidates in this important position, so the chapter decided to meet the day after the funeral in order to choose a new archbishop. The majority voted for the dean, Andreas Johannis, and two canons were told to escort him to Rome to receive papal confirmation.

Despite their speed, they had miscalculated. Before the archbishop's death Queen Margrete and King Erik had already pointed out their own favourite and secured his support in Vadstena. He was Jens Gerekeson Lodehat, a canon from Roskilde who was also the royal chancellor and a nephew of the powerful Bishop Peder Jensen Lodehat. The chapter's candidate was mysteriously persuaded to renounce the

post, and at the end of May Jens Gerekesson was appointed instead. Papal confirmation was no problem since his uncle Peder Jensen Lodehat happened to be in Rome and succeeded in gaining the pope's approval by June 8th. It all happened extremely quickly, leaving the Swedish Church furious over the broken promise to secure important positions for native candidates.

An unnamed monk from the Vadstena convent wrote a long letter of instruction to the new archbishop shortly after his appointment, in which he was seriously admonished to lead a pious and industrious life. It is obvious that the writer had played a role in his appointment, as he complains of his bad conscience. He prays incessantly "that God will give You love, wisdom and intellect, with which all Your faults can be covered." The letter ends with a final sobering reflection: "We who have been active in your appointment fear very much God's punishment, if You do anything other than good." It is very seldom that letters like these were preserved and the archbishop's election in Sweden gives us a rare chance to follow the intrigues below the surface.

Jens Gerekesson's time as archbishop was a disaster. His sexual excesses and criminal life eventually resulted in his dismissal but after a while he was restored to favour by King Erik, who appointed him Bishop of Iceland. Here he continued his former life and at last he was drowned in a river by a crowd of furious peasants in 1433.

His appointment as archbishop was one of the last favours which Pope Gregory XII granted the Nordic countries. Gradually support grew among the cardinals for John XXIII, and after a while the queen realized it would be wise to change sides. Payment of tithes was resumed and a papal nuncio was sent out to collect money for a new crusade, but the queen had no reason to regret her decision as John XXIII proved amenable to her wishes. Conditions at the papal court were described in an interesting letter which a canon from Linköping sent to his bishop when in Rome in 1411: "Here at the papal court the queen has numerous patrons, who are blinded by her gifts. At the trials all aspire to profit, especially advocates and attorneys, and if they are not paid sufficiently, they suppress even the most just case; they receive gifts and distort the sentences."

## CHAPTER FIFTEEN

### QUEEN MARGRETE'S RELIGIOUS GIFTS AND DONATIONS

Queen Margrete understood from the beginning that the Church's support was essential to the success of her reign. In the same way as she had bought the support of the *drost* Henning Podebusk by pawning him the castle of Holbæk and three districts in Zealand, she bought the goodwill of the old Bishop of Roskilde, Niels Jacobsen Ulfeldt, by granting the castle of Nebbe to the bishopric and pawning two districts and three-quarters of the town of Roskilde.<sup>1</sup> At the same time Copenhagen was also returned; it had belonged to the bishops of Roskilde from ancient times but had been occupied by Valdemar Atterdag during his reign.

During the 14th and 15th centuries the Crown appears to have had a special relationship with the bishops and chapter of Roskilde. Usually the post of royal chancellor was occupied by the bishop, and a majority of those employed in the chancellery were canons from the chapter. For anyone aiming at a career in the church it was a good place to begin; many bishops had started as canons in Roskilde. During his long tenure as bishop Niels Jacobsen Ulfeldt brought many estates to the bishopric, and when Peder Jensen Lodehat became bishop in 1395 the bishopric had a mortgage on a quarter of Zealand (seven districts [*herreder*] and the three towns of Roskilde, Køge and Nyköping).

Queen Margrete wanted to bind the Church closer to the government and her donations were part of this policy, although it would be wrong to underestimate her personal religious feelings. Hardly any Danish regent has granted so many great and precious gifts to the church as Queen Margrete. Often these were special items; in 1376 she gave a valuable monstrance mounted with precious stones to the cathedral of Lund. In 1407 the monastery of Børglum (an episcopal residence) received a wonderful golden crown, also mounted

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<sup>1</sup> Margrete grants Nebbe castle, pawns two districts and part of Roskilde to the Roskilde bishopric: Dipl.D. 3 rk. vol. IX, nr. 541.

with precious stones. The bishop and chapter were under obligation to keep the crown forever, and on every feast celebrating the Virgin Mary or other saints it was to be placed on the head of a statue of the Holy Virgin in the church of Børglum.<sup>2</sup> Unfortunately the crown was destroyed during the Reformation.

Likewise the guild of the Trinity in Flensburg received a pair of golden crowns, to be placed on the head of a figure of the Virgin.<sup>3</sup> On other occasions valuable chalices and dishes were gifted. In the church of the Bridgittine convent in Maribo (now a cathedral) a beautiful golden chalice from about 1400 is still in use. Under the foot of the vessel is a crowned M in red enamel—presumably referring to Queen Margrete (Plate 14).

On September 19th 1407 Bishop Eskil and the chapter of Ribe received 5000 marks from Queen Margrete to found an altar to Our Lady in the cathedral and “a Mass should be sung every day to celebrate the Annunciation eternally until Judgement Day.”<sup>4</sup> These memorial masses were for the benefit of the souls of her parents, her friends and her own soul.

The queen's donations of estates to churches and monasteries were so numerous that it would take too much space to list them all. They give an impression of great generosity, whether granted on special occasions or in joint portions, as in the summer of 1393 when the queen donated a considerable number of estates and castles while at the castle of Vordingborg. The bishopric of Viborg received the castle of Hald in northern Jutland; the bishopric of Børglum received the castle of Rugtved; the bishopric of Roskilde received the manor and estate of Saltø; the monastery of Our Lady in Roskilde received the manor of Ketilstorp in Odsherred, and the monastery of Hundslund in Vendsyssel received minor estates and farms in northern Jutland. All these generous gifts were granted on condition that both castles and manor houses “should at once be demolished . . . stone as well as timber,” and new altars for memorial masses to the queen and her family were to be founded. These conditions were of course part of her efforts to subdue the nobility.<sup>5</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> The Queen donates a golden jewelled crown to Børglum monastery: Rep. Dan. I, nr. 4880.

<sup>3</sup> The golden crowns of the Guild of the Holy Trinity, Flensburg: Dipl.F. I, 81.

<sup>4</sup> Consecration of an altar to Our Lady in Ribe cathedral: M.P., nr. 209.

<sup>5</sup> The donations of July 6th 1393: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. V, nr. 52–60.

Let us look at one example from the donation to the bishopric of Viborg, for which the original document on parchment still exists in the national archives. The castle of Hald given to the bishopric had been redeemed by Queen Margrete in 1387. One can still see the great mound, on which the castle site measured *ca.* 70–90m. Originally the castle was built on an island with steep sides up to seven metres above the surface of the surrounding water. A minor archaeological excavation in 1908 revealed brick foundations and the remains of a so-called hypocaust. This was all that had been left when the castle was demolished following the royal donation.

During the reign of Valdemar Atterdag the powerful nobleman Niels Bugge lived at Hald, but dispute broke out with the king after he joined the counts of Holstein in 1351. A meeting of reconciliation in 1358 failed and on his way home Niels Bugge and his men were murdered on the beach by unknown assailants. Valdemar Atterdag claimed to have nothing to do with the crime so guilt had to be laid elsewhere—and in fact until 1874 three houses in the nearby town of Middelfart had to pay an annual penalty for the murders, known as ‘Bugge-money.’

The building materials from Hald were to be used for the construction of Our Lady in Viborg. It is uncertain whether this happened but it is likely that the altar to Our Lady which the queen had ordered was founded. Here there was to be “a Mass to Our Lady every day until the Day of Judgement, and while the Mass is celebrated, a candle should burn” for her parents, friends and her own soul. Each year on the second day after the Assumption (August 15th) “the bishop shall treat the dean and canons to food and beer in the best way, and the schoolboys (*peblinge*) shall be treated well that day and they shall received one barrel of beer, one hundred loaves of bread and other food as well, and they shall chant the hymn of thanksgiving to Our Lady which is called ‘Ave regina coelorum’ the same night before the altar of Our Lady in the before-mentioned church of Our Lady.”

The queen had clearly thought out her gift in every detail. The founding of an altar to the Virgin is typical, and the hymn ‘Ave regina coelorum’ was very popular during the late Middle Ages. Other hymns to Our Lady are mentioned in several other donations, including ‘Ave Maria’ and ‘Salve regina misericordia.’

The queen’s father Valdemar Atterdag is often mentioned in her memorial masses, while the name of her mother, Queen Helvig,

occurs very seldom. During the last years of her life Queen Helvig lived quietly in the Cistercian monastery of Esrum in the northern part of Zealand, and she was buried there in 1374. It seems Queen Margrete did not have a particularly close relationship with her mother, but on February 10th 1400 she nevertheless granted the monastery the estate of Egebjerg with "fields, meadows, woods, fishing-water, sheepfolds, mills both wet and dry, wasteland and built-up areas" on condition that the abbot and the monastery celebrated a memorial Mass every day "in front of the altar in the high choir of the convent, where Our mother lies buried." The Mass was to be followed by 'Salve regina,' the most well-known of the Gregorian hymns.<sup>6</sup>

In 1377 the pope had granted Queen Margrete permission to transfer her mother's body to the monastery-church of Sorø, but it appears this was not done. However Valdemar Atterdag, who had been brought to Vordingborg after his death at the castle of Gurre and buried in the castle church, was transferred to Sorø. Queen Margrete erected a magnificent sepulchral monument, but today only small fragments of the alabaster reliefs remain.

In 1401 King Erik and the royal councillors compiled a list of all the gifts and donations given to churches and monasteries by Queen Margrete and at the same time they confirmed the arrangements made by the queen in her will regarding "money, gold, silver or treasures." The list of donations is very long and does not even include the gifts in her will, which were not defined specifically although it was mentioned that the will had already been sealed. A few examples from the list are given below.<sup>7</sup>

The founding of a convent in Gavnbø for nuns of the Dominican Order is one of the more significant donations. A noblewoman and close friend of the queen from Scania, Ida Falk, had originally granted estates in Scania for the foundation of a convent. However in 1401 the pope allowed the queen to replace these estates with the manor of Gavnbø in the diocese of Roskilde, since the location was more suitable.<sup>8</sup> The list mentions the acquirement of Gavnbø "which she

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<sup>6</sup> The donations to Esrum cloister, February 1400: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. VII, nr. 245.

<sup>7</sup> King Erik's confirmation of Queen Margrete's gifts to churches and monasteries 1401: N.D.M. V, 1 pp. 1-8.

<sup>8</sup> Papal sanction of March 29th 1401 for foundation of a convent in Gavnbø: S.D. IV, 21.

bought partly for gold, silver and money, and partly by exchanging some Crown estates with estates from Skovkloster, and with this and other Crown lands she founded a convent in Gavnbø.” We do not know much about the convent itself, but the beautiful light church which was built in 1408 still exists.

The list also includes large donations of estates to the monasteries of Sorø and Ringsted as well as the cathedral of Odense and St. Clemens in Århus. Churches and monasteries in Sweden also received estates, in particular the cathedrals of Linköping and Strängnäs, the monasteries of Roma on Gotland and Our Lady in Kalmar. It is noteworthy that the list does not mention any gifts to churches in Norway.

There can be no doubt of Queen Margrete’s piety, although she was adept at combining it with political opportunity. There is clear evidence of the enthusiasm and attention with which she took part in religious life. On August 3rd 1387 the monastery of Eskilstuna had to open the shrine containing the bones of St. Eskil and take them to the queen in response to “her urgent and pious request.”

Her passion for relics was also displayed when the Byzantine Emperor Manuel Paleologus sent her a piece of Christ’s robe in 1402.<sup>9</sup> At the time the emperor was travelling around Europe in a desperate attempt to get help against the Turks, who now threatened the Byzantine Empire to such a degree that it was only a question of time before its total collapse. The emperor carried with him a veritable arsenal of relics, but the ancient conflict between the Latin Catholic and Orthodox Churches hindered his efforts and after three years he was forced to return home without having accomplished anything. Later the pope sent a letter which left no doubt that he had no intention of aiding the Byzantine Empire if it remained faithful to Orthodox belief: “The Turks would not dare to attack you if they knew that you were united with the rest of Christianity, and the Christians would come to your rescue with far greater eagerness if they knew that you fully agreed with them.”

In his letter to Queen Margrete the emperor made no secret of the fact that the purpose of his generous gift was to gain support against “the suppression and pursuit of the cruel Turks—these ene-

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<sup>9</sup> The Byzantine Emperor Manuel Paleologus sends Margrete a piece of Christ’s robe: S.D. IV, nr. 2948.



mies of the name of Christ." But his entreaties were wasted, since the queen felt no motivation for an adventure against the Turks.

*The donations in the will*

As already mentioned, Queen Margrete's will has been lost, but some interesting letters relating to it and dating from the end of 1411 have been preserved.<sup>10</sup> At the castle of Kalundborg the queen had assembled a circle of powerful clergymen led by the Bishop of Roskilde, Peder Jensen Lodehat. They were to administer distribution of the huge sum of 26,337½ marks which the queen wished to donate to different causes. The bishop and the Roskilde chapter received 16,337½ marks, to be distributed as follows within a year: 5000 marks were to be given to "poor churches and monasteries and among Our Lord's people and the homeless who own nothing, and to help poor virgins, women and men for their losses during the war" in Scania and Sweden. Obviously Queen Margrete was not blind to the dark side of her victories against the Mecklenburgs.

Another 8,437½ marks were to be divided into three equal parts. The first was to be given to churches and monasteries near Wilsnack "to honour God, Our Lady and St. Mathias for the grace and honour they bestowed upon these three kingdoms on the day of Our Lady and St. Mathias," i.e. February 24th when the queen's army won the great battle outside Falköping. The shrine of Wilsnack in northern Germany was a destination for thousands of pilgrims wishing to see "the holy blood," and it is noteworthy that the queen decided to express her gratitude for the victory in this way.

The second part was to be given to poor Nordic churches and monasteries which had not received specific gifts in the will. The third part was to be distributed "among women and unmarried girls, who if asked can assert that they have been violated and degraded during the wars east of Øresund (the Sound)" and for prayers "for the souls of those who died in these wars . . . whether they fought for or against the kingdom." These decisions reveal some very sympathetic traits in the queen's character.

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<sup>10</sup> The donations of Queen Margrete from 1411: "Tre gavebreve af Dronning Margrethe fra Aaret 1411": K.S. 3 rk. III, pp. 367–379.

The sum of 2900 marks remaining was to be administered by the Bishop of Roskilde and distributed to various causes, as follows:

- 1500 marks   Partly for pilgrimages, partly for alms and partly to help educate poor priests.
- 500 marks    An altar in Our Lady of Kalundborg.  
Clerical guilds in Roskilde, Odsherred and Næstved.  
The gilding of two pictures in the cathedral of Roskilde.  
Candles for Our Lady and St. Anna in the cathedral of Roskilde.
- 900 marks    Clothes, trousers and shoes for the poor.  
Poor churches and monasteries.  
Construction of a chapel in the cathedral of Roskilde for Abraham Brodersen.

The queen's decision to erect a new chapel in Roskilde for the soul of the knight Abraham Brodersen was followed by precise orders that it should have "two vaults with fine new stained windows, ornaments, pictures and other things as is customary, in such a way that the chapel with the help of God will be light and beautiful and good." Perhaps we may conclude from this that the queen had a taste for art and beauty.

Another donation document was given to the abbots of the monasteries in Sorø and Esum as well as the prioress and the dean of the convent of Our Lady in Roskilde. They were to administer distribution of 6000 marks, of which half was for the benefit of the convent of Our Lady in Roskilde, including building works. The other half was to be distributed among the homeless, poor priests, distressed virgins and widows and other people "who can gain no help elsewhere" and to pilgrims.

A third deed of gift was also given to the abbots of Esum and Sorø, who were to distribute the sum of 2000 marks. All the money was to be used to nominate a number of men as pilgrims on behalf of the queen, who would visit a long list of holy places all over Europe and the Holy Land (Fig. 25). All the pilgrimages were to take place within two years, and this cannot have been an easy task to administer, as the list was extremely long. Some examples are as follows: "First six men will go to Jerusalem and to Bethlehem and to all the holy places which lie in the surrounding areas, and to St. Catherine's (of Sinai). Likewise seven men will go to Rome to visit all the churches and the graves of holy men, the apostles as well as

others. Likewise nine men will go to Our Lady in Aachen. Likewise three men will go to St. Lodevig in France. Likewise three men to St. Thomas in Canterbury in England . . . *etc.*” This is just a brief excerpt from the list. No less than 125 men were sent out on pilgrimages to pray for the queen’s soul, although today it seems incredible that she would spend so much money for this purpose.

The last donation of 2000 marks was given to the monastery of Ringsted, where the main part was to be used for building work, with the rest going to the maintenance of nine poor people.

It is startling that these donations were only a supplement to the actual will, which at that time had lain sealed for many years. The queen was now 59 years old, and she must have scraped together huge sums of money during her reign. In 1401 the pope had excused her from fasting during Lent (this was not unusual at the time), and her confessor was authorized to excuse her guests at the royal court as well. A long time had passed since her days in Akershus as a very young queen who had hardly enough money for food and drink!

## CHAPTER SIXTEEN

### CHANCELLOR AND BISHOP—THE CAREER OF PEDER JENSEN LODEHAT

Peder Jensen Lodehat was the person who was closest to Queen Margrete during her reign—partly through his position in the Church, but most importantly as her political adviser for several decades. Right from the start his career was closely linked to the royal administration and in 1375, just after the death of Valdemar Atterdag, we find him mentioned in the sources for the first time.<sup>1</sup> On November 10th Queen Margrete granted “Our clerk Peder Jensen, canon in Roskilde, all Our property in Ubby” near the town of Kalundborg “with all the fields, grassland, woods and fishing rights.” This was a very generous gift. A couple of years later, when he interceded for a relative who had wounded another man at the castle of Kalundborg and had been sentenced to lose a hand, Queen Margrete pardoned the man.

Shortly after this episode Peder Jensen Lodehat went to Rome, where he became involved in the canonisation of the holy Birgitta on behalf of the Bridgittine Order. It is very striking how quickly he achieved a trusted position and it is quite possible that he had a powerful protector in Queen Margrete. In October 1379 he was appointed deputy for the examining judge in the canonisation process, which can be compared to a trial.<sup>2</sup> During the next six months he examined 20 witnesses, as is evident from the extant documents. Undoubtedly his part in Birgitta’s final canonisation and his experience of the papal court won him great favour in the Bridgittine Order, and this proved to be of great importance for his career.

We do not know any details of his clerical education, but in a list of students in the Faculty of Law at the University of Prague a

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<sup>1</sup> Margrete grants P.J. Lodehat her property in Ubby: Dipl.D. 3 rk. Vol. IX, nr. 532. Sources for his career are published in: D.M. IV (1750) s. 289–313, 353–365. – D.M. V (1751) pp. 36–43, 66–75.

<sup>2</sup> The canonisation process of St. Birgitta: *Acta et Processus canonizationis beate Birgitte*. Udg. Isak Collijn. Uppsala 1924–31.

'Petrus Joannos, canonicus Roskildense' is mentioned in 1381—this was probably Peder Jensen Lodehat.<sup>3</sup>

His first appearance among the higher ranks of the clergy dates to 1382. No doubt queen Margrete's success in having him elected as the new Bishop of Vexjö, long time before her assumption of power in Sweden, was partly due to the support of the Bridgettine Order. As mentioned before the chapter had already elected a candidate by the name of Henrik Karlsson as their new bishop, and a delegate was sent to Rome to have the election confirmed. He brought with him a letter, which described how all the canons—except one—had taken the decision. However this one canon, who according to the letter "lived in enemy's country, had been 'bought' by queen Margrete in the meantime and sent to Rome. He arrived just before the chapters delegate, and succeeded to win the pope's agreement to appoint Peder Jensen Lodehat as the new bishop in Vexjö. By this coup the queen had placed one of her close friends among the Swedish clergy, and no doubt Peder Jensen Lodehat fulfilled his obligations to his protector.<sup>4</sup>

However his time as Bishop of Vexjö was brief, for by 1386 he had been transferred to the bishopric of Århus, which had fallen vacant. Accompanied by the dean, he went to Rome himself to receive his confirmation from the pope. On his way back he had to borrow 45 ducats from a papal official in Genova, on condition that he paid back the sum within 15 days.

As Bishop of Århus he had much greater opportunity to participate in politics and his talents were often made use of by the queen. Of course his clerical duties took time as well and among other things he issued new statutes for the canons and priests. Nevertheless his preferred field of activity was politics and it is significant that he was the only one of the Danish bishops to attend the decisive meeting in Lund in 1387 after the unexpected death of King Oluf. There is little doubt that he and the *drost* Henning Podebusk were the driving force behind Queen Margrete's election as regent.

The *drost* died shortly after and from that time Peder Jensen Lodehat was the queen's closest adviser, taking part in all important meetings and negotiations. He was one of the most active of those

<sup>3</sup> Lodehat's studies in Prague: H.T. 8 rk vol. 6, p. 204.

<sup>4</sup> The bishop's election in Vexjö: Svenska Riks-Archivets Pergamentsbref nr. 1681, 1764 and 2077.

involved in preparations for her assumption of power in Sweden in the run-up to the Treaty of Dalaborg in 1388. He was constantly with the queen, whether acting as witness to a donation or speaking on foreign affairs such as the peace negotiations with the House of Mecklenburg at Lindholm castle in 1395.

In January 1395 the old Bishop of Roskilde Niels Jacobsen Ulfeldt died and in the autumn Peder Jensen Lodehat was installed as his successor, no doubt strongly supported by the queen. The bishopric of Roskilde was one of the largest in the country and held the mortgage of seven districts in Zealand and three towns. From the bishopric's taxable property register (*cadaster*) we know that it owned over 2600 farms in Zealand.<sup>5</sup> Copenhagen had also belonged to the Church from ancient times. The register, which dates from 1370–80, is an invaluable source of knowledge for properties and ownership in Zealand at the end of the 14thC. The Bishop of Roskilde was a powerful figure, and his role as Queen Margrete's closest adviser was confirmed officially by the title 'Chancellor of the kingdom of Denmark.' At the same time he was given responsibility for the great seal of the kingdom.

During the long negotiations in Kalmar in the summer of 1397 Peder Jensen Lodehat played a central role, and his seal can be identified among the ten on the union document. The following year he took part in discussions on confirmation of the Hanseatic League's privileges in Denmark, and sealed the resulting document with the great seal on behalf of King Erik and Queen Margrete.<sup>6</sup> On this occasion the Hanseatic towns of Danzig, Thorn and Elbing gave him valuable gifts.

Shortly after his appointment as Bishop of Roskilde Queen Margrete donated the castle of Dragsholm to him and gave the castle and fief of Saltø to the bishopric. It is clear that the bishop helped the Crown financially by granting loans and redeeming pledges for a large amount of money, and in 1397 four districts and two important towns (Roskilde and Køge) were returned to the Crown. On this occasion the bishop and chapter issued a full receipt to the Crown

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<sup>5</sup> The *cadaster* of the Roskilde bishopric. Published in: Danmarks middelalderlige regnskaber. 3 rk. 1, pp. 1–207.

<sup>6</sup> Confirmation of Hanseatic League privileges: H.R. IV, nr. 501 § 5, nr. 503 § 8.

for all the money owed to them by Queen Margrete and Valdemar Atterdag—in particular Copenhagen and its castle, which King Valdemar had ‘borrowed from the Church’ during his reign.<sup>7</sup> The money, which in 1401 added up to 40,000 marks, was recovered as follows: the Bishop of Roskilde was granted the fiefs of Skanør and Falsterbo as well as all the royal income from the herring market for an eight-year period.<sup>8</sup> Each year 5000 marks would be paid off the total debt. This was a very favourable arrangement for the queen, as rents were not counted in this. At the same time the districts of Ods, Tune, Skippinge and Lille and several estates were returned to the Crown. Peder Jensen Lodehat knew well how to repay his benefactress.

The Scanian noblewoman Ida Pedersdatter Falk was a close friend of Queen Margrete and Peder Jensen Lodehat and in 1398 she appointed them both as executors of her will. In it she referred to them as her greatest (*specialissimi*) friends and mentions a golden ring and a lidded silver cup which they had given her. The founding of the convent in Gavnbø was a result of their mutual efforts and Queen Margrete as well as Bishop Lodehat gave considerable gifts to the new convent.

In 1403 King Erik and Queen Margrete confirmed all the “privileges, rights, statutes, exceptions and jurisdictions” which had been granted formerly to the bishopric of Roskilde. By this period the bishop must have found little time for his clerical duties, although in 1405 he founded a chapel to St. Siegfried in the cathedral where he was later buried. He had a finger in the pie when his nephew Jens Gerekeson Lodehat was appointed Archbishop of Uppsala in 1408 and in 1411 the queen nominated him to administer the main donations of her will.

When the queen died the following year he lost a lifelong friend and protector. We have an unusual proof of their close relationship, for the year after the queen’s entombment in the royal burial chapel of Sorø he went there and “almost forced the monks” to hand over her body, which he brought to Roskilde and buried in the cathedral

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<sup>7</sup> The Bishop and chapter of Roskilde give a receipt to the Crown for everything owed them by Queen Margrete and Valdemar Atterdag (particularly Copenhagen), November 27th 1397: Dipl.D. 4 rk. Vol. VI, nr. 419.

<sup>8</sup> Queen Margrete pawns Skanør and Falsterbo for 40,000 marks to Bishop Lodehat: M.P., nr. 94.

choir. Three years later on October 19th 1416 he too died. On his tombstone he is portrayed as the forceful personality who left his mark on the government of three kingdoms throughout a generation (Fig. 26).

*The bishop's castle of Gjorslev*

The castle of Gjorslev on Zealand bears witness to Peder Jensen Lodehat's time as Bishop of Roskilde (Plate 16). Built in the shape of a cross, it is one of the best-preserved secular buildings in Denmark dating from the Middle Ages, although it cannot be described as a typical example of the period in form, construction or materials.<sup>9</sup>

In 1370 Gjorslev is mentioned only as a manor in the episcopal register and its estate is listed with 12 *bol*, which presumably equals the number of farms. However during Peder Jensen Lodehat's tenure as Bishop of Roskilde (1395–1416) the estate was fundamentally re-organized. Later sources mention that the bishop founded the castle of Gjorslev, and the architectural evidence supports this.

The castle stands in flat meadows and is surrounded by a broad wet moat. It is built in the form of a Latin cross, from the middle of which rises the 25m high central tower which was once crenelated. Under the cornice runs an elegant frieze with pointed gothic arches and on the east façade is a statue of the Virgin. The 1.4m high limestone statue was placed under a gothic canopy, but wind and weather through six centuries have largely disintegrated the figure. Nevertheless it is clear that it was once a fine work of art. Limestone was also used as the basic building material for the castle, with string courses in tile.

On entering the castle it is clear that much has changed through the centuries. The best-preserved rooms are the tower hall on the ground floor with its beautiful star-vaulting and the columned hall in the northern transept (Fig. 29). Here the four cross-vaults rest on a slim, round column of granite in the middle of the hall. In both rooms the bosses of the vaulting are decorated with well-preserved

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<sup>9</sup> On Gjorslev: Chr. Axel Jensen: Gjorslev. Roskildebispens borg på Stevns og dens bygningshistorie. Kbh. 1924. Johannes Hertz: "Gjorslev, en borg i Korsets tegn". Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark 1992, pp. 190–207.



coats of arms, including those of several influential members of Roskilde chapter in Peder Jensen Lodehat's day. From an old drawing we know that the bishop's own coat of arms was once there as well. In the eastern transept interesting embrasures can be seen in the north and south walls. They are 2.85m high and only 6–7cm broad with a circular hole in the middle, probably for firearms. Around the year 1400 cannons and guns became more important in warfare, and the embrasures in Gjorslev are the earliest evidence in Denmark of their use in fortifications.

A coloured drawing from about 1670 depicting Gjorslev was found in Braunschweig in 1988 (Fig. 28). It shows the original crow-stepped gables on the transepts still intact (except in the eastern transept), but the most interesting detail is the elegant little chapel with tall pillars which can be seen in the corner between the eastern and the southern transepts. In 1990 the National Museum of Denmark carried out an archaeological excavation here, and the remains of the chapel were found under the present courtyard.

We may wonder why the bishop was allowed to build such a fine castle only a few years after Queen Margrete had issued the laws of 1396 which explicitly forbade the building of new fortifications, but it seems Peder Jensen Lodehat received special permission. In any case Gjorslev can hardly be called a proper castle, since there are no defence walls or outer fortifications. It is most likely that it was built as a luxurious residence for the queen's royal chancellor and close friend.

## CHAPTER SEVENTEEN

### THE STRUGGLE FOR GOTLAND AND THE MYSTERY OF THE FALSE KING OLUF

When the Teutonic Order occupied Gotland in the spring of 1398, their explanation was that they were protecting Hanseatic merchants against the Baltic pirates. This apparently innocent move aroused Queen Margrete's deepest concern, for although it broke the last hold of King Albrecht and at the same time expelled the 'Vitalie-brethren,' she could not be sure if the Grand Master of the Order had further plans for Gotland.<sup>1</sup>

Her suspicions quickly proved to be well-founded, for as early as May 1399 the Grand Master Konrad von Jungingen attempted to legitimise the Order's possession of the island. The exiled King Albrecht pawned Gotland to the Teutonic Order for 10,000 nobles, in contravention of the Lindholm Treaty. This caused great tension between the Order and the Nordic Union. Queen Margrete demanded that the island be surrendered, but agreed to negotiate over Visby, which according to the treaty belonged to King Albrecht.<sup>2</sup>

However the Teutonic Order refused to leave Gotland and in August 1403 Queen Margrete declared that unless she received a better response before St. Martin's Day (November 11th) she would use force to regain the island. Her ultimatum was not met and as a result troops under the command of Abraham Brodersen and Algot Magnusson were landed on Gotland just after November 11th. Within a short time the whole island was conquered except the strongly-fortified Visby, which the Danish troops besieged (Fig. 10). But the defensive walls resisted every attack, and when 1500 Teutonic knights reached the town in March 1404, the siege had to be raised (Plate 13). Queen Margrete tried to help her troops by raising a fleet near Kalmar, but unfortunately it was surprised by the enemy. Over 100

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<sup>1</sup> Many of the sources are published in: *Bidrag till Skandinaviens historia ur utländska arkiver*, 11, xxvj–xlviij. (Styffe).

<sup>2</sup> May 25th 1399 King Albrecht pawns Gotland to the Teutonic Order: HR IV, 657.

ships were taken and more than 60 were burnt, according to the contemporary *Annalista Thorunensis*.

After this setback Queen Margrete decided to return to the negotiating table. The Teutonic Order also hoped to end the war and on July 1st the two parties concluded an armistice.

During the negotiations Queen Margrete made a clever move. She simply turned to the exiled King Albrecht, whose need of money made it easy to reach an agreement. At a meeting in Flensburg in November 1405 he handed over to the queen all his rights to Visby and Gotland for the sum of 8000 marks, depriving the Teutonic Order of any excuse for their presence on the island.<sup>3</sup>

The Grand Master must have been furious at the trickery of King Albrecht, who had pawned Gotland to them for 10,000 nobles in 1399. At first the Grand Master refused to surrender the island, but in 1407 an agreement was reached according to which Gotland was returned to the Nordic Union for 9000 nobles. Queen Margrete had prevented a dangerous attempt to control this important Baltic trading site, but the price was high. She had to defray the expenses of the campaign and pay King Albrecht as well as the Teutonic Order for the rights to Gotland.

### *The false King Oluf*

In 1402 there was a strange and tragic sequel to the death of the young King Oluf 15 years previously. At that time rumours had circulated about his sudden disappearance and in Norway in particular people refused to believe that he had died. These rumours spread all the way to Prussia and a contemporary author, Johan von Posilge, has left a vivid account of the consequences.<sup>4</sup>

In this year (i.e. 1402) a strange event happened in the land of Prussia. There was a poor, sick man who came to the country and stayed in a village near Grudentz. Here he was discovered by some merchants who asked him whether he was well-known in Denmark since he looked very much like King Oluf. He said that he was not the king.

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<sup>3</sup> Secret negotiations in Flensburg between Queen Margrete and King Albrecht: S.D. (1401–1420) I, pp. 646, 667–70, 507f.

<sup>4</sup> Johan von Posilge's account of the false King Oluf: S.R.P. HI, pp. 260–261.

Then they left him but returned with some other men and addressed him as their lord, the King of Denmark and Norway. About 16 years previously it happened that Queen Margrete had a son whom she had poisoned. Because of this a rumour sprang up that this man was King Oluf, who had hidden himself, and so another man had been poisoned instead of him, and thus he had escaped.

This story was heard by a citizen of Grudentz by the name of Tyme von der Nelow, and he fetched the man and treated him well. Some merchants from Denmark and Norway came as well and brought him to Danzig so that all the people could recognize him as king, and they showed him great honour and gave him everything he wanted. And a herald came to him and engraved a seal for him, whereupon he wrote and sent a message to the queen that he was her son, who had come to this country and gladly would have remained in poverty if the pope had not forced him to claim back his lands and kingdoms.

Then the queen sent a message to Prussia and demanded that he should be handed over to her; if he proved to be her son, she would accept him. Therefore the Grand Master sent him with some knights to the queen at Kalmar, and here he was shown to be false in every respect, since he was neither born in the kingdom nor was able to speak the language. In public he confessed that he had been born in a village near Eger and his father was called Wolff and his mother Margrete, but since these merchants and people from Danzig assumed he was king according to the herald and had given him everything he needed, then he had to consider himself as such (i.e. king).

Then the queen had him brought to Scania, where merchants from many countries meet, and after his own confession he was condemned to death. A huge stake was built and all the letters he had sent to the queen were draped on him and a crown put upon his head. He was shown to the people and placed in the fire and burned.

All the treasures he had in his possession were given to a monastery. The queen would not have any of his things except the seal which had been made for him. This she took and had it broken into pieces and destroyed.

Generally Johan von Posilge's account seems to be correct, as several documents exist which corroborate this strange affair. On June 17th 1402 several of the royal councillors of Denmark and Sweden sent a long letter to the Teutonic Order's Grand Master, in which they explained in detail the circumstances surrounding King Oluf's death on August 3rd 1387.<sup>5</sup> This account was given because the councillors had been told that "a slanderer, a forger and a traitor,

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<sup>5</sup> The royal council's statement on King Oluf's death: S.D. IV, nr. 2924.

who calls himself Oluf” had appeared in Prussia “to great insult to our gracious lady the queen and her three kingdoms.” The councillors could prove and witness that the real King Oluf had died in Falsterbo castle in the arms of his chamberlain Folmer Jacobsen, and in the presence of several of his personal servants including the court chaplain, the cupbearer, the master of the court and the cook. Folmer Jacobsen himself, accompanied by Wulf Wulfram the mayor of Stralsund, delivered the letter to the Grand Master.

The queen had not been present when the king died, said the councillors, since at the time she was staying in Ystad. They also testified that the king “was cut up and embalmed, as kings were formerly, and was placed in the church of Falsterbo with his face uncovered.” His bowels were taken to the cathedral of Lund and buried there, and the body was transferred to the great church in Sorø “where several kings and queens lie buried.”

After this detailed account they requested the Grand Master to send to them this “slanderer and traitor, who has insulted, defrauded and lied to our gracious lady and to us.” They feared that the affair could damage relations with the Teutonic Order.

The Grand Master replied promptly to Queen Margrete in a letter dated July 21st and promised to send “the man who calls himself King of Denmark” to Kalmar accompanied by knights and messengers.<sup>6</sup> A meeting to negotiate over Gotland had been agreed for St. Jacob’s Day (July 25th) and this would be a convenient occasion to settle this matter as well.

It is little wonder that Queen Margrete wanted to bring the unpleasant affair to an end as quickly as possible. In order to halt the rumours she had to make the trial a public event, and what better place than the great herring-market in Falsterbo, where merchants and travellers from many countries gathered?

An account from Lübeck mentions the execution, but adds that “this man had several marks and identifying features on his body like those the real Oluf had, and he said many secret things to the queen which nobody would know except her and her son.”

The rumours spread all the way to Italy, and in Perugia a distorted version of the story was told about a man who had died in the city in 1415. This man by the name of Erik (a confusion between

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<sup>6</sup> The Grand Master promises to send the false King Oluf: S.D. IV, nr. 2928.

King Oluf and King Erik) was said to be a son of King Haakon and Queen Margrete. Because of his great piety he had refused to be crowned and had fled to Italy, where he became a Franciscan friar. However he returned later and was arrested as an impostor and taken to the stake. Miraculously he remained unharmed and the people praised him. He returned to Perugia, where he died in 1415 after having revealed his royal origin. This strange story is the result of misunderstandings and distortions which go back to the 16thC, when the story of the false King Oluf became mixed up with that of an unknown saint in Perugia who was said to be of royal origin. The story was printed for the first time in 1557 in a book about the Franciscan Order.

This unlikely mixture of rumour and fact reveals a lot about communication in the Middle Ages. In a society without newspapers it was extremely difficult to control sources of information, and when rumours began to circulate they were almost impossible to stop. Queen Margrete's move to have the false King Oluf admit publicly that he was an impostor was well-considered. He was thought to be a heretic as it was believed the Devil had taken possession of his soul and forced him to call himself King Oluf. Condemnation to the stake was the usual sentence as it was believed the fire saved his soul by breaking his alliance with the devil.

We will never know the real identity of this poor, confused man, but it seems clear that he was the innocent victim of unscrupulous plotters.<sup>7</sup> For Queen Margrete it must have been a painful reminder of her son's death, but the sentence inflicted cannot be judged as harsh. Death was a common penalty at the time.

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<sup>7</sup> See also Vivian Etting: "Den falske Oluf—et studium i virkelighed og myter". Kung Olofs minne. Red. Christer Bökwall, Falsterbo 1987.

## CHAPTER EIGHTEEN

### A ROYAL WEDDING

As King of Denmark, Sweden and Norway, Erik of Pomerania was the ideal son-in-law. At a time when great European nations like England, France and Germany were characterized by endless political and religious struggles, the reign of Queen Margrete had drawn much attention to Scandinavia. Seen from outside, the Nordic kingdoms appeared to be a peaceful and stable area following the defeat of the House of Mecklenburg. The queen had avoided any involvement in the great European conflicts and she was very wary of engaging in any kind of deal or agreement other than official confirmations of peace.

1399 saw the dethronement of the English King Richard II and the establishment of a new dynasty by his cousin Henry IV of Lancaster. However at the beginning Henry's reign rested on very fragile foundations, and he had to gain support through foreign alliances. As he had six children living, marriages were an effective way of achieving this.

The king's attention was directed to the young unmarried King Erik and his sister Katharina, who had been taken out of the convent in Vadstena. However before he began official negotiations, King Henry wanted information on the laws of succession in the Nordic kingdoms. In 1400 the Bishop of Bangor and the nobleman John Paraunt were sent to Denmark from the English court. The results of their investigations were given in a report in Latin dated August 8th 1400.<sup>1</sup>

They noted that both Denmark and Sweden were kingdoms of election, although the kings were usually chosen from among the royal family. Norway had a royal order of succession, and the delegates doubted that Erik would be king after the death of Queen Margrete. However they also noted that the young king was beloved by his subjects because of his charming and dignified personality,

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<sup>1</sup> The account of the English delegates: B.S.H. II, pp. 109–14.

and they found the three kingdoms peaceful and stable following the unification.

Even though much was misunderstood the report was in general very instructive. It concluded that there seemed to be no danger of King Erik being dethroned. Henry IV could proceed with his plans and direct negotiations were begun. On May 3rd 1401 the English king issued a letter of safe-conduct to the archdeacon of Roskilde, Peder Lykke, who had been appointed by the queen to conduct the negotiations. This must have been about the same time as the English delegates returned from their winter stay in Denmark. In a letter of June 16th they explained that they had not dared to travel on German ships because of the danger of piracy. They explicitly mentioned the great kindness and helpfulness of Peder Jensen Lodehat, Bishop of Roskilde, so apparently this was another affair in which he played a central role.

In October of the same year Peder Lykke returned to Denmark accompanied by two Englishmen who carried a letter to the young King Erik. The king and Queen Margrete were in north Zealand at the royal castles of Gurre and Søborg, where they received the delegates and then ordered their return to England, presumably carrying an official request from King Erik for a marriage with King Henry's youngest daughter, Philippa. At the same time negotiations were begun for a marriage between the English heir to the throne, the Prince of Wales, and King Erik's sister Katharina.<sup>2</sup>

In May 1402 English lawyers were instructed to arrange the marriages. King Henry IV had plans for a far-reaching alliance and they were told to consider every possibility in order to strengthen his position. However it was some time before they were able to discuss this with the queen, since she was occupied with the affair of the false King Oluf and the war on Gotland. It was not until October that talks began at Helsingborg castle.

Queen Margrete firmly declined any kind of alliance directed against France or any other nation. She had no intention of risking involvement in a war in which the Nordic kingdoms had no interest. The English delegates for their part were dissatisfied with the

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<sup>2</sup> See L. Daac: "Erik af Pommerns, Danmarks, Sveriges og Norges konges giftermaal med Philippa, prindsesse af England". Norsk Hist. Tidsskr. 2 rk. 11, pp. 332-374. 1880.



laws of succession and suggested that the title of king should be hereditary. Their intention was clear, as they demanded that "in case King Erik—God forbid it—should die without any heir, then the royal councils should be obliged to elect one of the children who—with the will of God—would be born of the marriage between the Prince of Wales and Princess Katharina, and all the present gentlemen, clergy and nobles, as well as all the gentlemen and the estates who would attend the next general assembly would promise and confirm with their seals that women would have these rights in the succession, as in England."

It seems this demand was completely ignored by the Danes. At worst it might result in a situation where the Nordic kingdoms would be ruled by the English Crown, and neither Queen Margrete, King Erik nor any of the councillors wanted this to happen. On November 3rd King Erik announced that he had spoken to the councillors of all three kingdoms. He would not make any decision until July 2nd the following year "since he would lay this matter in the hands of the Holy Virgin and her son." He was also wary of entering into any alliance against other countries and proposed a treaty which besides the formal declarations of friendship made only vague references to mutual obligations in case of war.

Concerning the dowry of Princess Philippa, King Erik renounced any sum of money or gift; this point must have been agreed from the beginning since according to English law only the king's eldest daughter was given a dowry. However King Erik promised Philippa a suitable 'morning gift' (*morgengave*) for her income. In a similar manner the Prince of Wales would be obliged to grant an income to Katharina suitable to her status.

This rather cool reaction to the English demands resulted in a deadlock, and the proposed marriage between the Prince of Wales and Katharina was eventually abandoned. There is no further record of King Erik's marriage until spring 1404, when the Danish delegate Peder Lykke arrived in England. Unfortunately the important messages were given orally and the extant letters are only formal introductions. He returned home in August after a troublesome journey and met King Erik and Queen Margrete in Sweden.

The areas of disagreement seem to have been resolved, and six people (three from the clergy and three from the nobility) were appointed to handle all the formal arrangements and escort the bride to Denmark. Due to bad weather they were unable to leave until

the end of November, by which time preparations for the wedding were in full swing.

Philippa was expected to arrive in Bergen in Norway in the spring of 1405. Plans were made for King Erik to receive her with a distinguished assembly of bishops, knights, ladies and maidens. But the princess herself was delayed, and King Erik had to return without her. Queen Margrete had written a very detailed letter of instruction to the young king, since his journey was also a tour of inspection during which he was to handle the affairs of state and receive the homage of the people by himself for the first time. This letter will be discussed in detail in the next chapter.

Finally all the formalities were in order and on December 8th 1405 the wedding was celebrated for the first time in Westminster Abbey with a proxy for King Erik. This was the usual procedure, and now Philippa was Queen of Denmark, Norway and Sweden even though she had never seen her husband. On the same day Henry IV issued a strange announcement which mentioned certain persons "who are not children of God, but of the father of evil and falsehood" who "with deceitfulness and fraud slandered and defamed *magister* Peder Lykke, the archdeacon of Roskilde, and secretly told certain distinguished persons that he had made it a condition that the English king should grant him a lifelong annual pension for arranging the wedding." The king rejected these base rumours completely, but we will never know the true story behind this pronouncement.

Philippa did not leave England until the summer of 1406. She and her large train of 204 attendants sailed for Denmark in a fleet of 10 large and 4 small ships, but the weather was bad and they suffered many misfortunes before reaching land. At last on October 26th the wedding was celebrated in the cathedral of Lund, where the archbishop officiated at the ceremony. Queen Philippa was a young girl of 12, so presumably some years passed before the marriage was consummated. As her mistress of the household Queen Margrete appointed Katharina, her own former foster-sister from Akershus who was a grandchild of the holy Birgitta.

*Queen Philippa's trousseau*

By chance the inventory of Queen Philippa's trousseau has been preserved, and it allows us a unique opportunity to look into her wardrobe.<sup>3</sup> The English court tailor John Dun carefully described her full allowance of gowns and robes, among which her wedding dress naturally attracted most attention. This was a beautiful tunic-cut gown with long hanging sleeves, bordered with ermine. Over it the queen wore a cloak with a long train of white satin and velvet, likewise lined and bordered with ermine. She must have been a wonderful sight at her wedding in the cathedral and later at the great celebration at the archbishop's palace.

In addition to her wedding dress Philippa had five other gowns, which were also described in detail by John Dun.

1. The first was made of cloth-of-gold from Cyprus, decorated with white flowers and lined with ermine.
2. The second was made of red velvet, embroidered with pearls and lined and bordered with ermine. No less than 1368 large pearls and a great number of small pearls were used in the embroidery.
3. The third was made of red-gold cloth from Cyprus, decorated with white roses and also lined and bordered with ermine.
4. The fourth was made of cloth-of-gold from Cyprus with blue flowers on white, lined and bordered with ermine.
5. The fifth is described as a gown of green cloth with 'tartarin.'

The queen also had several cloaks, tunics and sleeves as well as a cap of beaver pelt lined with ermine and decorated with a silk button and a tassel.

The sumptuous trousseau included a wedding-bed, which deserves a short description. It was equipped with a canopy of cloth-of-gold from Cyprus, decorated with thistles on red and black, with six cushions. At the head of the bed another length of cloth-of-gold was suspended, which was decorated with gold falcons and swans and lined with ermine. Two mattresses, sheets and other linen belonged to the bed.

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<sup>3</sup> The inventory of Queen Philippa's trousseau: Baildon: "The trousseau of Princess Philippa, wife of Eric, King of Denmark, Norway and Sweden". *Archaeologia* LXVII 1915-16, pp. 163-188.

There was also a wedding-coach with trimmings of cloth-of-gold, gilded copper nails, red leather, golden ribbons from Venice and silk laces. For comfort inside there were six leather cushions covered with cloth-of-gold and silk.

And there was much more, among other things a great amount of silver plate and complete furnishings for the queen's private chapel. She also had three elegant pairs of boots and 30 pair of shoes. Eight saddles, bridles and gilded harnesses were given to King Erik's officers, and it is likely that this harnessing was for the horses which would draw the wedding-coach. The list seems endless. Philippa's train of 204 attendants were dressed in green and red, and no less than 32,762 squirrel pelts were provided to trim these robes. The ships were decorated as well, and a certain John Drayton constructed a special pavilion for the queen's ship, "Le saint Esprit." King Henry must have spent vast sums of money on his daughter's trousseau.

Queen Philippa brought a crown with her from England for the wedding and the coronation which followed. Both this and King Erik's crown were later given to the Bridgittine convent in Vadstena with the proviso that they would be loaned back for the coronations of future kings and queens of the Nordic Union. In 1454 a precise description of the crowns was recorded by three goldsmiths and it is clear that the queen's crown was by far the finest.<sup>4</sup> It was set with a large number of precious stones: diamonds, emeralds, sapphires, rubies and pearls. On the basis of this description it has been possible to make a rough reconstruction, which closely resembles an existing crown which belonged to Queen Philippa's elder sister Blanche, who married Prince Louis III of Bavaria in 1402 (Plate 17). This is a masterpiece of the Gothic goldsmith's art and Queen Philippa's crown was probably very similar. Many years later the two crowns from Vadstena were pawned in Lübeck, and at this point they disappear from the story—it seems there was not enough money to redeem them!

We have no description of the wedding itself, but no doubt it was celebrated for several days with banquets, processions and tournaments. However in the wider context King Erik's marriage to an English princess did not result in closer political relations. Henry

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<sup>4</sup> The description of the crowns has been published by Gottfrid Carlsson: "De båda guldchronorna i Vadstena kloster". In *Fornvännen* 1956, pp. 95–109.

IV's aim of establishing an alliance with the Nordic Union was never realized, although regular diplomatic connections were maintained between Denmark and England. Philippa became very influential in politics but she died in 1430 at the age of 37 without having borne any children.

## CHAPTER NINETEEN

### THE QUEEN'S LETTER OF 1405

It is very seldom that the sources allow us a glimpse of Queen Margrete's own strong character. An exception is her letter of 1405 with instructions to the 23-year-old King Erik, written just before his journey to Norway to meet his new bride (Fig. 30). The letter is preserved in the National Archives and is actually a small paper book of eight pages, in Danish and presumably written by the queen herself.<sup>1</sup> Although an exact date is missing it was obviously written between January 21st 1405, when King Erik and Queen Margrete stayed at Egholm castle in Sweden, and February 15th, when according to the instructions he was due in Vinger.

The queen's strict admonitions to her foster-son fill 54 highly confidential sections, so it is almost a miracle that the letter was preserved. In the following discussion I will refer to some of the most important points. Unfortunately the introduction itself has been lost, but the first existing section stresses that "You shall maintain peace everywhere you go, and if anybody hurts others or starts a riot, either at your manor or elsewhere, you shall pass sentence on them; you shall not side with those who have done it but with your officials, for then it is easier to govern and sentence."

Thus in the first part we already see the queen's forefinger raised to her young foster-son, whose temperament seems to have been rather impulsive. Some minor points follow concerning two of his companions, his journey through the district of Värmland and donations to several churches.

Part six states that "Everywhere you go the common people must pay homage to you and swear that—with the help of God—they will recognize you as their king by the grace of God and do everything for you as they ought for their king. And you shall tell them that you will secure peace, law and order with all your power. You

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<sup>1</sup> Queen Margrete's instructions to King Erik, published in: *Norges gamle Love* 2 rk. vol. 1 (1388–1447), nr. 37. Also in: *N.D.M.* VI, 4 s. 241–264.

must not fail to do this wherever you go." This section reveals a lot about Queen Margrete's perception of the Crown's role in society. The absolute title of *king by the grace of God* (which occurs for the first time in the coronation charter) indicates a very different role for the king than that to which he was entitled by the laws of election. A well-known work of political philosophy at this time (Ægidius: *De regimine principum*) argued for absolute kingship as the best kind of government, on the basis that the king's power came directly from God. Consequently the king was superior to the laws, although his government must not develop into tyranny. Perhaps Queen Margrete was inspired by these theories, which in any case reflected her own political ambitions.

In the following sections the king was urged to have his armed men with him always. As far as possible he was to avoid carrying out legal proceedings in the villages, even if he was asked to. It seems Queen Margrete tried to prevent the inexperienced king from becoming involved in local affairs. Sections 10 and 11 deserve closer attention: "In Akershus there is a room where there are all the ancient royal letters, accounts and registers concerning the properties of the king and other things. As soon as you arrive at the castle, you shall demand them from *magister* Amund . . ." At this time Amund Bolt was the royal official at Akershus. This command was a result of the queen's efforts to transfer all important letters and accounts to the royal archives at the castle of Kalundborg, in order to control them better.

"If *magister* Amund or anyone else invites you to dinner, you shall dine with them, and if any man or woman, young or old, wants to give you anything, you must receive it kindly. Otherwise people will be hurt and they will take it in another way than intended, which can lead to many awkward situations." Here we see clearly an experienced woman offering sensible advice, and it gives us a good impression of the queen's own character.

The next section advises the king to inspect the provisions at Akershus as promptly as possible and to choose his companions for his journey to Tønsberg. He also had to collect a tax in butter, skins and money which was presumably related to his wedding with the English Princess Philippa. The letter also refers to all "the bishops, knights, ladies and maidens who will travel to Bergen to receive her." As already mentioned, Philippa's journey was postponed and she did not arrive until the following year. Queen Margrete then ordered

that “our daughter must stay at Akershus, because it is not proper that you take her with you around the country.” Apparently Erik’s sister Katharina had accompanied him for part of his travels.

After some discussion of the journey to Tønsberg and the departure of delegates to England we come to a very important section: “If the Norwegians wish to keep the seal of the kingdom which was in the possession of the dean of Oslo (the late chancellor of Norway), and the man who shall succeed him has not yet arrived, you must tell them that you have to speak with the royal council about who this should be and you must not show them the seal. If he has arrived, you must say that you want him for this post and will try it for a time, as he has held similar responsibilities before. You must not point out any other man as chancellor or hand over the seal of the kingdom to anyone else . . . because I (i.e. Margrete) think that you can find no better man for this post. If someone says that he cannot be both royal official (fiefholder) and chancellor at the same time, you must answer that you will ask him yourself what he thinks of it. . . . because I think that he will undertake both posts.”

Apparently the man the queen wanted to install as chancellor of Norway was the knight Claus Grubendal. Previously the Norwegians had complained that Queen Margrete wanted to take the official seal of Norway to Denmark, but before she handed it over she wanted to be sure that the new chancellor was the man she had chosen. It seems the 23-year-old king had very little choice in the matter, but no doubt the queen was afraid that something would go wrong.

In fact the Norwegian seal was not returned until after the queen’s death and the royal council of Norway was prevented from taking important decisions. Claus Grubendal was German and Queen Margrete must have been aware that this might cause discontent. The next section underlines that King Erik “should not give anyone the authority to demote or advance him (Grubendal) or take the fiefs from him which he now possesses—except God, yourself and I, since there are some people who do not like him because he is a foreigner . . .”

Part 23 deals with some very practical matters, including the command that the towns of Tønsberg and Oslo should each donate 100 pairs of boots and 98 pairs of shoes which the king was to distribute among his servants.



Soon after this there is an interesting section which reveals a lot about the queen's firm hold on politics: "If any priest or layman comes to you and asks you about privileges or exceptions or patents of nobility . . . you shall delay the matter as long as you can. If they insist on knowing your opinion, you must lay it upon me and say that you expect me daily and as soon as I come you will do it, if I advise you to, but you must not do anything before I come, because I know more about it than you. And you must be satisfied with this and be very cautious before giving anyone a letter with your seal, the one you wear daily."

Probably Queen Margrete was nervous that the Norwegian noblemen would manipulate the inexperienced young king. She was always extremely careful when she issued sealed letters and later in her instructions she warns him again: "You must take care not to issue many letters with the seal which you now wear, and no parchments with hanging seals. If someone asks about exemptions from tax written in a letter on paper with hanging seals, you shall not hang your seal under this, but have it impressed on the back of the letter on paper."

It was easier to go back on decisions which were written only in an unofficial letter. Queen Margrete used this trick in order not to be bound to any promises when awkward circumstances arose—one can't help thinking of the union document of 1397, which was written on paper with impressed seals.

After some discussion of internal Norwegian affairs, an extra tax is mentioned—a 'help' (*hjælp*)—which was probably imposed to cover the wedding expenses: "If someone asks you for the 'helps' which are being imposed now all over the country, you shall not grant them to any man. But the officials who are appointed to collect the tax shall receive and keep them and give an account to you. The tax shall be used for the purpose you well know, and you shall not give anything of it to anyone. But you shall let your appointed officials and councillors answer for it—if anything happens you will be blamed."

It was common for a king to impose an extra tax on the occasion of his wedding, but the procedure has never been described in such detail. The journey to Norway was the first time the king would manage state affairs on his own and the queen had to consider every eventuality in her advice.

Other comments on internal affairs are followed by some very personal remarks: "You shall apply to God for help and often read and consider these sections and points, so that you understand them completely and are able to answer and act accordingly with the help of God. You must handle all things wisely, piously and justly in the best way, which God will grant."

"You shall be restrained and correct both early and late, and serve God first. You shall guard your words and not say anything, either in anger or at any other time, which can harm you or others, for fear somebody should blame you." In these lines we come very close to the woman behind the queen's official mask, while at the same time her advice tells us much about the weak points of the young king. From Hanseatic accounts we can recall the queen's cautious and carefully considered actions, which could turn suddenly into a sharp attack. On the surface she seemed most obliging, but she had a strong will and could not be manipulated. For a young man like King Erik, who had a quite different character, it must have been difficult to live up to her expectations. But although the queen kept a firm hold on the affairs of state until her death, she seems to have had a warm relationship with her foster-son and King Erik always remembered her with great affection.

After this advice king Erik is told to report all the news and tell her how the legal cases turn out. The queen underlines once again that "if anyone asks you about legal documents concerning sentences which have been passed previously, you shall answer that you don't know about these sentences and delay as long as you can. If you are unable to postpone it any longer, you can say that as soon as your mother comes you will attend to it, if we both agree."

Finally Queen Margrete forbade the king to issue any confirmation on the receipt of royal fiefs. The letter ends with a long and affectionate farewell: "Hereby I commit us to the protection of God, our Lady and St. John. And let us travel and act in the name, peace and command of the above-mentioned, and with the help of God meet again with honour, peace and quietness in soul and in body—in the name of Jesus, St. Mary, St. John and all the saints. *In nomine Patris et Filii et Spiritus Sancti. Amen.*"

## CHAPTER TWENTY

### THE SLESVIG-HOLSTEIN PROBLEM

In 1386 Queen Margrete had granted the duchy of Slesvig to Count Gerhard, a grandchild of the famous Count Gerhard who had been killed in 1340. But what appeared to be a victory for the aggressive Slesvig-Holstein nobility actually required them to swear allegiance to the Danish king and thus recognize Danish sovereignty. In this way Queen Margrete secured peace in this important part of the kingdom which had been split by internal struggles for a long time.

Although the Slesvig-Holstein nobility had won a legitimate right to the duchy, the queen had no intention of giving up her position. When Duke Gerhard was killed in 1404 during a campaign against rebels from Ditmarsken (the march-lands of Slesvig) she saw a chance to regain the duchy. The fatal battle had broken the nobles' power and a contemporary chronicle related that "more than 300 noblemen were murdered that day in this place."

Duke Gerhard left behind his widow Elisabeth with three boys under age (one of them as yet unborn) and two daughters. Now the question arose of who should take over the leadership and administration of the duchy until his eldest son had grown up. The brother of the deceased duke, the Bishop of Osnabrück, travelled at once to Holstein in the hope of taking over the duchy. However he was opposed by the widow Elisabeth, who chose King Erik as her children's guardian instead.

In the chronicle of Holstein there is no doubt that the cunning Queen Margrete stood behind this decision. It relates that "after the death of the duke, when she saw and heard of the dissension among the leading men of Holstein, she judged that she could regain the duchy of Slesvig and thereafter, when it had returned to the kingdom with all its castles, she would gain access to Holstein and subdue the Hanseatic towns of Lübeck and Hamburg."<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The Chronicle of Holstein (Presbyter Bremensis). Ed. Anna Hude 1903, p. 108.

It is unlikely that the queen's ambitions went so far, but the account gives a good impression of the disturbances which resulted from her aggressive policy. The chronicle goes on to say that the queen discussed with her councillors whether they should use armed force or slowly regain the duchy and its best men through money and gifts. The latter method was chosen and "then the queen summoned the duchess and her guardians (a provisional council of knights from Holstein) and by great promises and granting gifts to some of the magnates she was made a guardian and protector of the whole duchy."

Although in formal terms it was King Erik who became guardian, the chronicler was well aware that Queen Margrete stood behind him, and perhaps this view of the queen's long-term strategy was not so wrong after all. The duchess had to pawn to her the castle of Tønder with its accompanying districts as well as the main part of Nordfrisland. At the same time the queen redeemed the castle of Haderslevhus from the widow of Henrik Ahlefeldt, who had been killed in the battle of 1404. Soon after this she bought the castle of Trøjborg from the Limbæk family and in 1406 she persuaded the bishopric of Slesvig to hand over the two castles of Svabsted and Stubbe to her for a six-year period.

Through her determined purchase of estates and the redemption of properties Queen Margrete gradually gained mastery over most of Slesvig. Eventually the duchess controlled only the main castle of Gottorp, the towns of Sønderborg and Flensborg and the islands of Als and Ærø. The situation was very unstable and continuing internal struggles meant that peace was broken again and again. The nobility felt threatened by the queen's quite blatant attempts to take over the whole duchy. In 1409 the queen accused the duchess of responsibility for plundering and breaches of the law and demanded 11,400 marks as compensation. At the same time the unfortunate duchess was deprived of power in Holstein by her ambitious brother-in-law, the former Bishop of Osnabrück. In the end she had to surrender and gave the town of Flensborg and the castle of Nyhus to the queen as security for the compensation.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>2</sup> Duchess Elisabeth's letter on the 11,400 marks, Oct. 9th 1409: Dipl.F. 1, s. 164.

*The revolt in Holstein*

The nobility began to plan a direct revolt against Queen Margrete and King Erik. The Bishop of Slesvig, Johannes Skondelev, who supported the queen, was assaulted and taken as a prisoner to Flensburg. He was accompanied "wounded and half naked" to the south, according to a later account. The two castles of Svabsted and Stubbe, which at this time were pawned to the queen, were conquered as well. Duchess Elisabeth joined the rebels and at Whitsuntide in 1410 she declared that she would pay the 11,400 marks to redeem Flensburg. This was rejected by Queen Margrete and King Erik on the grounds that their deadline had not been met.

The chronicle of Holstein relates a strange episode in connection with this which is unknown in any other source and should thus be treated cautiously.<sup>3</sup> Nevertheless I will quote the account because it reveals a lot about the queen's reputation among the Holsteiners:

Meanwhile the queen approached as if she knew nothing about this (i.e. King Erik's refusal to hand over Flensburg) and she came to the duchess in Slesvig and gave many good promises and wished to settle everything. She pretended she was sorry for the king's decision and said that if they would have full confidence in her all would go well for the duchess, her sons and family.

And she solemnly asked to be entrusted with the castle of Gottorp, if only for an hour, for the reason that when the Danes learned that the agreement existed, they would sooner be reconciled with the Holsteiners. The duchess, who believed the queen's words and promises, allowed her to come to the castle with some of the greatest councillors of the kingdom of Denmark. And with a great train of attendants—although this was against the agreement—the queen came to the castle, put a cross on the tower and kissed it and asked for the keys. When she had received them the queen and the duchess dined together.

But secretly the queen asked one of her councillors by the name of Henrik Skarpenberg: 'Is it all right?' This Henrik Skarpenberg then looked at the tower and saw people who were drinking and gambling. Due to the great number of the queen's attendants, the captain of the castle had had a cask of beer brought from the house to the tower. And the above-mentioned Skarpenberg, who thought the tower had been filled with soldiers and crossbow-men for a secret purpose, went

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<sup>3</sup> The Chronicle of Holstein (Presbyter Bremensis). Ed. Anna Hude, 1903, pp. 112–114.

to the queen. And the queen asked him: 'Is it all right?' When he answered, 'No', she spoke to him secretly and he told her that he had seen that the tower was full of people. When the queen heard this, she was afraid and started to weep bitterly. She rose and said to the duchess, 'You have no confidence in me. Things will go badly for you and yours.'

And if those people in the tower had not been seen, she would have kept the castle deceitfully forever, but thanks to God she had to withdraw with empty hands. When the duchess finally understood the queen's guile, she trusted her no longer. . . . And from that time there was open enmity between the queen, the king and the Holsteiners."

As noted, it is unlikely that this event ever took place, but there can be no doubt that the queen wanted to possess Gottorp, which was the main castle of the duchy. The remark that the queen started to weep bitterly should not be understood as a female weakness. In the Middle Ages it was no shame even for heroic knights to burst into tears—it was a respected way of expressing one's feelings. Here the chronicler wanted to underline the queen's deceitfulness.

Open war was now a reality and King Erik raised an army which in the summer of 1410 conquered the islands of Ærø and Als. However on August 12th part of the army suffered a great defeat in a battle near the village of Eggebæk. The Danes fled in panic. The chronicle of Holstein related with pride that "ever since, this victory gave the Holsteiners a courageous heart to fight against the Danes, as a Holsteiner equalled five Danes in this battle."

However in the long run the defeat did not influence events and the king still controlled Ærø and Als. An armistice was agreed in September and it was decided that a court of arbitration should settle the matter. After several adjournments the final meeting took place in the castle of Koldinghus in March 1411. It was agreed to maintain the situation as it had been before the war broke out, for a period of five years.<sup>4</sup>

The agreement required the Holsteiners to return the two castles of Svabsted and Stubbe. King Erik had to leave Ærø and Als. However the agreement generally favoured Denmark since Flensborg and the castle of Tønder remained under Danish control. In the meantime Queen Margrete had won possession of Åbenrå and the

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<sup>4</sup> The peace negotiations in Koldinghus, March 1411: Dipl.F. 1, nr. 57–59.

adjoining districts by lending 3000 marks to the Duke of Sachsen-Lauenburg.

Everything seemed to be going well for Queen Margrete and King Erik despite the defeat at Eggebæk, but when the treaty came to be written and the documents exchanged between the parties, the Holsteiners refused to confirm it after all. During one night in 1412 they managed to take Flensburg although the Danes still controlled the fortifications on the so-called 'mountain' outside the town. The Holsteiners justified the attack by claiming the Danes had broken the peace in building the fortifications. But this was not the last word on the matter; Queen Margrete tried once again to settle things by negotiation. Duke Ulrich of Mecklenburg was appointed judge although there was no way he could be described as impartial since he served Denmark at this point. In spite of protests from the Holsteiners he decided that Flensburg should be returned at once to the Danes. On October 24th 1412 Queen Margrete received the homage of the citizens on behalf of King Erik and the Danish kingdom.<sup>5</sup> Her policy in Slesvig had been successful and now the likelihood of her assuming complete power in Slesvig seemed greater than ever.

Only four days later, during the night of October 27th, the queen died on board her ship off Flensburg.

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<sup>5</sup> The citizens of Flensburg pay homage to Queen Margrete, Oct. 24th 1412: Dipl.F. 1., nr. 62-64.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-ONE

### THE DEATH OF QUEEN MARGRETE

We do not know the reason for Queen Margrete's sudden death. She was now almost 60 years old and was very active to the last, but she may have been infected by the plague epidemic sweeping Flensburg at the time. The Holstein chronicle remarked gloatingly that "Queen Margrete of Denmark, the instigator of all these misfortunes, ruler of three kingdoms, had at the end of her days when God decided that she should leave this life—however wonderful it might be—not a single piece of land in all her kingdoms where she was allowed to die. While she was on board a ship off the town of Flensburg her soul left her body during a great and strange storm of thunder and lightning."<sup>1</sup>

These 'supernatural circumstances' connected to the queen's sudden decease tell us quite a lot about the mystique which was attached to her person. The Lübeck chronicle tells another story concerning her death. After the surrender of Flensburg the queen ordered that people who were accused as traitors should be arrested. "Some of them were beheaded, while others were broken on the wheel or hanged. Among them she had two priests imprisoned and one of them was beheaded and the other hanged. When the priest went to the gallows, he said to the queen: 'You have condemned me to this shameful innocent death. I swear and promise you by the strict Judge (i.e. God) that you will follow us within three days and will answer for the death which you now inflict on me.' Thereafter, on the third day, the queen died on her ship and departed."<sup>2</sup>

As with the scandal of the false King Oluf, stories like these attracted great attention. However it is very doubtful if there is any factual basis for the anecdote. It is likely the rumours began after several executions and the gossip was recorded later by the chronicler in Lübeck.

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<sup>1</sup> The Chronicle of Holstein (Presbyter Bremensis). Ed. Anna Hude 1903, p. 125.

<sup>2</sup> The Chronicle of Lübeck (the later additions to Detmar). Ed. Grautoff II, p. 602.



The body of the deceased queen was brought to the great church in Sorø where her father and her son were buried. However it remained there only for a short while. The following summer the Bishop of Roskilde, Peder Jensen Lodehat, had her body transferred to the cathedral of Roskilde. Of course this caused great discontent among the Cistercian friars in Sorø, who claimed that it had been done by force.

Nevertheless the bishop had acted throughout with King Erik's approval and on July 4th 1413 the entombment of the queen was solemnized with the greatest religious ceremony ever seen in Denmark. A contemporary German chronicler, Herman Korner, described the event in detail:

King Erik celebrated a solemn funeral ceremony in Roskilde at which the following persons were present: Bugislav, Duke of Pomerania; Johannes, Duke of Sachsen; the Archbishop of Lund and 15 other bishops. The ceremonies lasted for three days. The first day was in honour of the recently-deceased Queen Margrete, and the requiem was celebrated at 50 altars. From the king every altar received a golden adornment, from the queen a golden altar-cloth or a weaving of silk from Damascus, and besides this a gilded chalice of silver. The princes offered a florin to each altar. The knights and the other participants in the ceremony took as much as they wanted from a bowl filled with silver coins and offered them to the altars. . . . The offerings of these adornments and chalices to each altar were done according to Queen Margrete's own decision when she was alive. The altar-cloths were made by her own hands. Such a magnificent entombment with rich gifts of altar-cloths, chalices and golden coins to the church has never been celebrated elsewhere in Europe.<sup>3</sup>

This was a grand claim, but Herman Korner must have got his information from one of the participants. Undoubtedly delegates from the Hanseatic town of Lübeck were present, so it could not have been difficult to find an eyewitness.

Some of the gilded chalices which each altar received still exist (Fig. 31). Five almost identical chalices, all bearing the name of Queen Margrete, have been found in various parish churches. Today two of them can be seen at the National Museum, including the beautiful chalice from the church of Krønge on Lolland. The inscription

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<sup>3</sup> The funeral celebrations in Roskilde (from the chronicle of Herman Korners): K.S. 3rk.V, pp. 809–811.

on the foot says in Latin: “+ *elemosina domine margarete regine dacie swe-cie et norwegie. Orate pro ea*”, which means: “Memorial present to lady Margrete, Queen of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. Pray for her.” Denmark’s coat of arms with three blue enamelled leopards on gold is soldered on the foot, and on the opposite side there is a crucifix.<sup>4</sup>

A comparison with the other chalices indicates that they were made by the same artist. Presumably this was done after the queen’s death, since she never titled herself as Queen of Denmark, Sweden and Norway. How these chalices ended up in small parish churches we have no idea—it may have happened during the Reformation, when all the side altars in Roskilde cathedral were abolished.

Unfortunately the altar-cloths reputed to have been made by the queen have been lost, so we can only wonder how she found time to do needlework between administration and political negotiation—always assuming that the information given to Herman Korner was correct.

From the great ceremony of 1413 onwards the cathedral of Roskilde became the royal burial-place. Queen Margrete’s elder brother Christoffer was already entombed in the choir, but generally the great church of Sorø had been the preferred burial-place of the royal family since 1332. No doubt Queen Margrete had imagined that she would be buried in Sorø, where she had built a marvellous tomb for her father and where her son Oluf lay buried as well. But it was not to be. In accordance with the plans of Bishop Peder Jensen Lodehat and King Erik, the cathedral of Roskilde became the official ecclesiastical centre for the Crown. Bishop Jens Andersen, successor and nephew of Peder Jensen, later put up stalls with 48 seats in the choir (Fig. 12). An inscription in Latin states: “In honour of the holy and indivisible Trinity and the blessed pope and martyr Lucius, the protector of this holy church, and by order and expense of the reverend father and lord in Christ, master Jens, by the grace of God Bishop of Roskilde, this choir has been completed in the year 1420 after the birth of the Lord in order to save the souls of his very renowned queen, lady Margrete, patroness of all the clergy, who lies buried here, as well as his most beloved uncle, Bishop Peder, his predecessor in honourable remembrance. For during the reign of

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<sup>4</sup> The chalices of Queen Margrete: Henry Petersen: “Levninger af domkirkeskat-ten i Roskilde”. Aarbøger for Nord. Oldkyndighed og Historie. 1888, pp. 122–128.

this queen, prosperity and happiness were enjoyed by all the inhabitants of the kingdoms. Therefore blessings on her and on everyone who wishes us well."

The stalls are decorated with a timber frieze of carved biblical pictures depicting symbolic scenes from the Old and New Testaments. On the bench ends which previously framed the door of the choir there is a carved relief of pope Lucius, patron of the church, with the crown and the keys of St. Peter. Above him is the Danish martyr-king St. Knud (Canute) under the Danish coat of arms. They symbolize the cordial relationship between the clergy and the state.

### *The tomb*

Contemporary with the execution of the stalls is the marvellous tomb of Queen Margrete.<sup>5</sup> It was put in the place of honour in the middle of the choir, suggesting they wanted to give the deceased queen an almost divine character (Fig. 33). The tomb was completed in 1423 and King Erik had the following Latin inscription painted in gilded letters along the edge: "In the year of the Lord 1412 on the day of the holy apostles Simon and Judas the highly renowned princess and lady, Margrete, former queen of the kingdoms of Denmark, Sweden and Norway, died and the following year on the fourth of July she was buried here. Since all posterity will not be able to honour her as she deserves, this monument has been erected to her memory at the expense of the high prince now reigning, King Erik, in the year 1423."

It is a great pity that we do not know the artist of this masterpiece, but there is little doubt that he and his workshop were of high international repute. However today a large part of the tomb is a reconstruction, as much of the fine relief and sculpture in alabaster was destroyed during the 17th and 18th centuries. Luckily the life-sized statue of the queen was spared and her majestic head constitutes the best-preserved part of the monument, even though the tip of her nose has been restored and the present crown is a work of the 16thC.

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<sup>5</sup> Queen Margrete's tomb and the stalls in Roskilde cathedral: "Danmarks Kirker" Kbh.s amt III-IV Roskilde domkirke, pp. 1672-98 and pp. 1796-1829.

It is very unlikely that the statue can be seen as a portrait of the queen, since it almost certainly depicts a highly-idealised woman in her prime, not an older woman of about 60. The reconstruction of the monument, based upon the preserved decorative fragments in alabaster and marble, was carried out by the sculptors F.G. Hertzog and Carl Aarsleff, who worked on it for many years. The original fragments are remarkably fine examples of the almost 'classical' gothic style, emphasized by the flowing draperies (Fig. 32). The inspiration drawn from French art is very clear, and no doubt the original artist was foreign, perhaps from the Netherlands. King Erik must have spent a large sum of money on this monument.

It has been suggested that an unfinished alabaster bust which can be seen in the Museum of St. Anna in Lübeck is a preliminary work for the Roskilde statue, but in my opinion this is wrong. There are similarities, such as the hairstyle, but this was an international fashion at the time. A comparison between the two heads shows that the Lübeck bust portrays a much younger woman whose general features are different.

When Queen Margrete died King Erik was 30 years old. None of the contemporary sources seem to doubt that the queen had been the real power in the kingdoms until her death. The Lübeck chronicle tells us: "this honest queen had now ruled three kingdoms for 30 years, as she had the good reputation of governing her kingdoms in peace and with wisdom."

Why the queen never remarried is an interesting question. She was only 27 years old when King Haakon died, and could have found a suitable husband without any difficulty. The Nordic kingdoms could easily have financed her dowry and trousseau, and in any case she had a large income from her estates. I believe the answer is clear. She could only keep her political position if she remained unmarried and could act as guardian and co-regent for the king. There can be no doubt of her political ambition, which was demonstrated most obviously when she was elected regent just a week after her son's death in 1387. Her strong character was also revealed in her instructions to King Erik in 1405. Let us end this chapter with a quote from the annals of Vadstena, which states rather sourly: "during her life she was very fortunate in worldly affairs."

## CHAPTER TWENTY-TWO

### A ROYAL GAME OF CHESS

In 1386 the chronicler Detmar of Lübeck remarked after the endowment of Slesvig: "When this happened all the nobility of Denmark feared the wisdom and power of this queen and offered her their service. She summoned all the vassals in the kingdom and travelled around from castle to castle, where they swore her allegiance, and everywhere she transferred the vassals from one place to another, just as a prior sends his monks from one monastery to another. . . . We may marvel at this lady, who was so poor that she could not afford a meal of bread without help from her friends. All her castles were pawned, and from this situation more violence than justice arose."<sup>1</sup>

It is small wonder that commentators abroad were surprised by the queen's sudden rise to power and wealth, considering the miserable condition of her court at Akershus. The comments of the Lübeck chronicler were well-founded. Queen Margrete knew that control of the royal castles as well as private estates was essential if the crown's economic crisis was to be resolved. Immediately after her accession in 1375 she began the purchase of estates and the exchanges and redemptions of properties which would characterize her government until her death. Many sources have been lost so it is difficult to form a clear picture of this important part of her economic policy, but we can examine the main points of her strategy, which made the Danish Crown the economic centre of Scandinavia.

The beginning had been extremely difficult. The kingdom had not yet recovered after the war with the Hanseatic League (1367–70), and all the fertile districts east of Øresund had been surrendered as indemnity for a 15-year period. The Crown lost the rich income from the market in Scania and had to be satisfied with taxes, customs and the income from the royal estates. In addition the Danish

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<sup>1</sup> The Chronicle of Lübeck (Detmar): Ud. Grautoff, 1 s. 333.

nobility had insisted that the young King Oluf should promise in his coronation charter that anyone who had unjustly lost his estates to the Crown should have them returned. If disputes arose the case would be tried by a special court of the local bishop and eight men. This resulted from King Valdemar's ruthless policy of bringing as many estates as possible under the Crown's control. After the king's death the nobility took the opportunity to halt his policy. The copyholders of the nobility and the church were not obliged to pay taxes, so the Crown faced a double loss of income if any royal estates returned to private hands.

In general the coronation charter was quite mild in tone, but on this point the nobility was persistent, "in order to prevent the soul of King Valdemar suffering agony and torments" in purgatory because of his dubious transactions.

There is very little evidence of the trials initiated by the coronation charter, but one good example concerns the estate of Nebel in northern Jutland. In July 1376 a court of justice held with the Bishop of Børglum, three knights, six esquires and three peasants decided that this estate should be returned to the widow of Ebbe Strangesen, although he had sold it to King Valdemar and received payment for it. The widow claimed that according to the law she had rights to the estate and this was approved by the court, apparently because she had not confirmed the deed.<sup>2</sup>

We do not know how many similar trials the Crown was involved in, but it was not long before Queen Margrete had so far taken control of the situation that she was able to turn things around and continue in her father's footsteps. The organisation of the royal courts was one of the means of restoring royal authority, and after a short time the queen was able to begin the extensive purchase of estates again.

In 1382 she redeemed the Crown estate of Abrahamstrup and later won a promise from the nobility that they would desist from buying new peasant farms.<sup>3</sup> At the same time all such purchases of farms during King Oluf's reign were declared invalid. In 1385 the queen's position was strengthened even further when the Hanseatic League surrendered Scania. From this time her political and eco-

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<sup>2</sup> On the estate of Nebel: Rep' Dan. 1 rk. vol. II, nr. 3099.

<sup>3</sup> Abrahamstrup is redeemed Oct. 31st 1382: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 4, nr. 272.

nomic skills enjoyed general respect. The number and extent of her transactions rose and in 1387 she was able to redeem the castles of Ravensborg, Hald and Hørningholm as well as Kærstrup and the island of Tåsinge. Two years later she paid back 9000 marks to Benedikt von Ahlefeldt to redeem the fief of Næsbyhoved.<sup>4</sup> At the same time she transferred many officials and captains in the royal castles and exchanged the captains at the important royal castles of Vordingborg and Kalundborg.

After the death of King Oluf and the queen's assumption of power her economic position improved still further. This prepared the way for the new laws of 1396 connected to the coronation of King Erik. In an attempt to restore peace, the nobles were forbidden to build new castles. At the same time it was decreed that all peasant farms which had previously belonged to the Crown should be returned, if the transfer had occurred after 1368. Special courts were appointed in each district to investigate these transactions. The nobility also had to swear not to "take or buy peasants' land, or reduce the royal income in any way, until God decides that he (i.e. King Erik) is grown up." These edicts clearly demonstrate the queen's powerful position just before the great meeting in Kalmar in 1397 to negotiate the Nordic Union. Instead of a coronation charter containing the nobility's demands on the new king, a law was issued which in every respect reduced the nobles' power.

In Sweden the Nyköping recess went even further. It was decided that all royal officials and captains who had been "entrusted with, or had pawned or lent" any royal estate since Albrecht became king (1363) should at once return it without any form of compensation. As in Denmark special courts were to be appointed to investigate cases and hold trials. All those who had recently been ennobled were deprived of their rank and title unless the ennoblement had taken place previous to King Albrecht's reign, or King Erik approved it. All fortifications and castles built since 1363 were to be pulled down immediately if King Erik and Queen Margrete no longer required them.

It may be questioned whether such drastic decrees were actually carried out. Based on local court documents which have been preserved, the answer must be yes. In Denmark they prove that a

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<sup>4</sup> On Næsbyhoved: Dipl.D. 4 rk. vol. 4, nr. 143.

considerable number of estates were returned to the Crown, and the Church was not spared in the process. In 1406 the archdeacon, cantor and chapter of Ribe had to renounce their rights to “the fortifications upon which Nørholm is built as well as the outer castle and the surrounding fields and meadows and the mill and millpond outside Nørholm.” Nørholm was one of the many smaller castles in Denmark.

The trials continued up to Queen Margrete’s death. In 1408 the knight Palne Kirt and his brother had to give up ten farms and estates in Vendsyssel (in Jutland), and admit that “they had previously been sold, conveyed and given to the mighty lord, King Valdemar—may his soul rest with God—and the Crown and kingdom of Denmark.” Their uncle had indeed administered the estates for some time “but not because he or we had or have any right to it.”

Transactions like these must have been very profitable for the Crown. Unfortunately it is impossible to estimate how many estates were returned, but let us take an example from another part of the country. In 1399 the German Bertold von der Osten and his wife conveyed the estate of Annæs as well as lands in Valby, Ølstykke and Greve to Queen Margrete for compensation. Valdemar Atterdag had previously persuaded the knight Niels Avessøn to hand over the estate “of his own free will” but Annæs in fact remained in the nobleman’s possession and was inherited by his daughter, the wife of Bertold von der Osten. Thus there was no discussion of the Crown’s rights to the estate, but in acknowledgement of the special circumstances Queen Margrete paid them a small sum in compensation.

The extent of the transactions appears to have been wider in Jutland. In 1408 the knight Niels Strangesøn and his wife Mette Pedersdatter had to hand over many peasant farms in Mors and Thyholm to Queen Margrete and King Erik. There were 35 farms of different sizes with “fields, meadows, forests, pastures, fishing waters and mills” and everything else “wet or dry—abandoned or built up.” In this particular case Queen Margrete “because of her special grace, love and good will” allowed Niels Strangesøn to administer the same estates as long as he lived. His wife was to be allowed to retain several of them if she lived longer than her husband.

At the same time the queen continued with her redemptions and exchanges of properties. I have already mentioned her economic collaboration with the Bishop of Roskilde, Peder Jensen Lodehat, who



in 1401 received Skanør and Falsterbo for a period of eight years as security for a debt of 40,000 marks which the Crown owed the bishopric.<sup>5</sup> However as early as 1407 the queen was able to repay the final part of the money, and the bishop and chapter of Roskilde returned a receipt.

During these years the queen invested huge sums in her economic transactions. The royal castle and fief of Riberhus was redeemed in 1399 for 8000 marks from the knight Henneke Limbek,<sup>6</sup> and the next year she acquired the manor of Højstrup for 2000 marks. By looking at the amount of money spent by the Crown in Slesvig to gain control over castles and fiefs (the castles of Tønder, Haderslevhus, Trøjborg, Svabsted and Stubbe) we can get a clear impression of the range of her economic activities.

In Sweden the trials brought in far more castles, estates and peasant farms than in Denmark and the specially-appointed courts worked with great ruthlessness. In one district of Västerås the Crown acquired more than 500 farms. However in Sweden the political purpose of the transactions was different. The Crown was seeking to eliminate the mainly German elite who had gained control over large areas and fiefs during King Albrecht's 25-year reign.

The Danish historian Kristian Erslev has estimated that during these years the Crown acquired about 20 manors on Zealand and 30 manors in Jutland as well as a great number of farms and smaller estates. It is quite surprising that the nobility tolerated this ruthless expansion of the Crown's power, but the queen's authority must have been so strong that any resistance seemed a waste of time. Even in particularly harsh cases such as the trial and execution of the knight Abraham Brodersen, no-one dared to protest.

Over many years Abraham Brodersen had managed to acquire a large number of estates and manors, mostly east of Øresund. He was clever enough to gain the Crown's favour and was soon granted a seat in the royal council. After a while he was entrusted with important official tasks, such as commander of the army. But in 1410 everything went wrong. With King Erik he took part in the

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<sup>5</sup> The pawning of Skanør and Falsterbo to the Bishop of Roskilde: M.P. nr. 94 og 201.

<sup>6</sup> The castle and fief of Riberhus are redeemed, 1399: Dipl.D. 4 rk. Vol. VII, nr. 123.

campaign to Als during the struggles with the Slesvig-Holstein nobility, when a peace treaty was agreed. However immediately after this he was imprisoned and accused of rape and in accordance with the new treaty his life was forfeit. On August 27th Abraham Brodersen was beheaded outside the town of Sønderborg.<sup>7</sup> All his estates were confiscated and his relatives declared humbly that they had no right to any inheritance “unless the queen would graciously grant them something.” She did not intend to!

Throughout his life Abraham Brodersen had been a merciless money-grubber, so no-one protested over his ignominious end. The charge of rape seems to have been a convenient opportunity for Queen Margrete and King Erik to get rid of a nobleman who had become far too powerful. The queen herself was not present at the trial, so we do not know whether she approved the sentence. However it is interesting that the following year she founded two chapels in the cathedrals of Roskilde and Lund for the soul of Abraham Brodersen—which cannot be described as a normal way to remember executed criminals! Perhaps it was a touch of bad conscience.<sup>8</sup>

During a trial many years later (1460) some interesting remarks on her character emerged. The nobleman Erik Nielsson Gyldenstjerne claimed that “when good men died in the kingdom—men with big estates and fiefs—Queen Margrete usually took their money and silver, all that she could get hold of. Thus it is proved of Mogens Munk, that after he was slain and lost his life for her sake, she took everything he owned in gold, silver and money and said it belonged to the Crown. She had taken it in order to keep it on behalf of the Crown. She did the same thing after the death of my uncle Peder Nielsen of Ågård, when she took 1200 heavy English nobles from his children in addition to gold, silver and other money. The same thing was done to Jacob Mus and many other fine and mighty men in this kingdom. I have been told that she did the same thing to Sten Bengtsson in Sweden, the marshal Erik Ketilsson and several other good men in that kingdom.”<sup>9</sup>

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<sup>7</sup> Henry Bruun: “Abraham Brodersen”. H.T. 11 rk. 111.

<sup>8</sup> Queen Margrete founds chapels in Roskilde and Lund cathedrals for the soul of Abraham Brodersen: Rep. Dan. I, nr. 5183. S.D. 11 nr. 1525.

<sup>9</sup> Erik Eriksson Gyldenstjeme's remarks in 1460 on Queen Margrete's ruthlessness are quoted from a copy by Kr. Erslevs of a letter in the Swedish National Archives, Stockholm.

Today it is impossible to confirm all these accusations, but in the case of Mogens Munk it looks as if the charge was justified. Twenty-three years after Queen Margrete's death a complaint was lodged that in 1401, after being informed of the death of Mogens Munk on the battlefield in Slesvig, the queen had taken all his estates and money. Following this complaint King Erik examined several high-ranking people who had accompanied the queen at the time and their statements seem to confirm the suspicion:<sup>10</sup>

At the time when Queen Margrete heard that Mogens Munk had died, she went to Bygholm and from there to the manor of Boller and took all the estates and money into custody. Some time later she returned to Bygholm and handed over the above-mentioned estates to the heirs of Mogens Munk in the presence of ourselves and many other good men.

The queen's actions seem very questionable indeed, and if this case is just one example of many we cannot be surprised that her reputation in this area was rather frayed.

It is impossible to mention here all the purchases and exchanges of estates made by the queen. Besides her great efforts to secure the Crown economically, she also had to administer the personal estates which she held in Sweden and Norway as her dowry. To these belonged the rich Swedish iron and copper mines, which could be utilized occasionally if she lacked available funds. This happened in 1402 in her dealings with the Bishop of Roskilde to cover a debt of 2000 marks.

The economic consolidation of the Crown during Queen Margrete's 36-year reign could not have proceeded without difficulties. No doubt she often had to raise large loans in order to fulfil her obligations, but it is difficult to estimate the number or scale of these. Receipts which have been preserved by chance can give a distorted picture of actual conditions. However they are better than nothing, and the following examples reveal some of her creditors from her last years. In 1391 she pawned the manor of Lykkesholm to the royal official of the castle of Nyborg for a loan of 10,000 marks.<sup>11</sup> A minor loan of 2000 marks from Henneke Limbek was paid back in 1398,<sup>12</sup> and

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<sup>10</sup> The case of Mogens Munk: Rep. Dan. 1, nr. 6786 og 6792.

<sup>11</sup> Lykkesholm pawned to Henneke Olufsen for 10,000 marks, 1391: Dipl.D. rk. 4. Vol. IV, nr. 467.

<sup>12</sup> Repayment of a 2000-mark loan to Henneke Limbek, 1398: Dipl.D. 4 rk. Vol. VI, nr. 661.

on November 11th the same year Benedikt von Ahlefeldt and his five sons gave a receipt to the queen for 6900 marks.<sup>13</sup> There is little doubt that the Church was the Crown's most important creditor and Queen Margrete's numerous donations for various religious purposes should be seen in this context as well. The bishopric of Roskilde played a central role with the Bishop Peder Jensen Lodehat as the key figure.

It has been claimed that Queen Margrete introduced a new taxation system by transferring the tax on land to personal taxation. However this was the case only when additional taxes were levied in 1389 and 1396 to cover war expenses and monetary reform. It was thus not a permanent system.

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<sup>13</sup> Benedikt von Ahlefeldt and others give a receipt for 6,900 marks, November 11th 1398: Dipl.D. 4 rk. Vol. VI, nr. 664.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-THREE

### ART, EDUCATION AND LITERATURE

The term ‘art’ nowadays means the work of a specific painter, sculptor or architect who through his work has tried to convey a certain message or impression. However such a concept was unknown to the carver, painter or builder of the Middle Ages, who first and foremost considered himself a craftsman. The self-esteem of the ‘artist’ emerged in the Renaissance, but of course this does not imply that the men of the Middle Ages were unaware of their talents.

To a very large extent the art of the Middle Ages came from workshops and the master executed only the finest and most important details. All other work was carried out by his assistants and journey-men and the final piece was only occasionally signed by the master himself.

In Queen Margrete’s time Denmark was dominated by the high and late gothic styles. In contrast to the strict style of the Romanesque period the ideal was now elegance and lightness. In architecture soaring pointed arches predominated, and a new freedom in composition, expression and colour was found in painting and sculpture. Gothic ornamentation did not yet have great influence and many of the preserved works are executed with a fine sense of simplicity.

The marvellous altar triptych in the cathedral of Lund is the oldest existing carved altarpiece from Denmark (Fig. 36). It is over 2m high and 3.81m wide and in both size and quality it is a masterpiece which must often have been admired by the queen when she visited the cathedral. We are fortunate in being able to date the triptych accurately to 1398. In this year the noblewoman Ida Pedersdatter Falk gave 10 silver marks to cover the remaining expenses of the altarpiece which had been carved recently to embellish the high altar. At the same time she appointed her “dearest friends” Queen Margrete and Bishop Peder Jensen Lodehat as executors of her will, and thus we have an interesting reference to the queen’s close friends. As mentioned before, these three founded the convent of Gavnø.<sup>1</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> The will of Ida Pedersdatter Falk: Dipl.D. 4 rk. Vol. VI, nr. 617.

Originally the altarpiece had four panels which could be opened or closed according to the holidays and festivals of the Church. Today the outer wings are gone and only 28 of the original 42 carved figures remain. But although it is a partial reconstruction it gives a very good impression of the original gothic masterpiece. In the centre the Virgin Mary sits on a throne beside her son Christ and above them is an exquisitely detailed canopy (Fig. 37). The finely-carved ornamentation of the panels is also very typical of the period.

Unfortunately we do not know the identity of the master craftsman, but the altarpiece is likely to have been executed in Germany or at least strongly inspired by German art. The convent church of Ystad owns a lesser but very similar altarpiece which probably came from the same workshop. Other than these, very few altarpieces have been preserved from the reign of Queen Margrete.

In both execution and division of labour, the creation of such an altarpiece was complex and time-consuming. When the workshop received the commission the work was divided between the apprentices and journeymen. A team of journeymen put together the altarpiece with its wings and carved out the rougher decoration. The master and his best men then carved the important figures and sculptures. Then a third team put a canvas facing on the parts to be painted, laid a foundation of chalk, gilded the haloes and at last the paintings were done.

Many side-altars were needed as well for the numerous saints and martyrs. In the church of Falsterbo there is a very fine triptych with an almost life-size statue of St. Christopher, carrying the Christ child on his shoulder and with a staff in his hand (Plate 21). On the inside of the panels are paintings of the imprisonment and beheading of the saint. Perhaps this triptych was already in the church when King Oluf lay here after his death in Falsterbo castle. It is a fine piece, but since it is unsigned as usual we must deduce its origin from other evidence. Many details indicate that it came from the workshop of master Bertram in Hamburg, whose known works are very similar in style.

Other fine examples of the art of carving are the choir-stalls of Lund, Roskilde and Ringsted, which were made in Queen Margrete's time. The cathedral stalls in Lund date from the second half of the 14thC. They are among the finest in Europe and as they were cut of oak from Scania, they were probably made in Lund. However this does not exclude the possibility that the artist came from abroad.

Originally the stall—with 75 seats for the chapter canons—was placed in the choir and formed a great U in front of the high altar. In the Middle Ages the common people were not allowed access to the choir, which was reserved for the clergy. In Lund there are two rows of seats. Those at the rear have high chair backs crowned by an elegant frieze with carvings under small canopies. The carved reliefs depict on the north side scenes from the Old Testament, while on the south side there are carvings of Christ's resurrection, the eleven prophets and typical scenes from the twelve months of the year.

These carvings are among the finest examples of 14thC Scandinavian art which still exist. The month of May is symbolized by a handsome young man with a falcon on his wrist, ready to go hunting in the green forest, while August is shown as a peasant harvesting his field (Fig. 38–39). In November two pigs are about to be slaughtered. The bench-ends are beautifully carved as well, particularly the relief which depicts the Queen of Sheba visiting King Solomon. Her elegant curved posture is typical of the gothic style and the folds of her dress emphasize the slim lines of her body (Fig. 40).

The stalls in Roskilde cathedral cannot match those of Lund, but they have their own special charm. As already mentioned, they were erected in 1420 by Bishop Jens to commemorate the “highly renowned queen, Lady Margrete” and his “beloved uncle, Bishop Peder.” The carvings, which are rather naive, show scenes from the Old and New Testaments.

Queen Margrete's tomb has already been discussed so I will mention some other sepulchral monuments of the 14thC. Around 1390 the queen erected a grand monument for her father Valdemar Atterdag in the church of Sorø. This has been demolished and today only a small fragment of alabaster relief remains. Although this figure of a kneeling bishop has great artistic merit it is in a very different style to the figures on Queen Margrete's tomb. We know the monument's original appearance from a 17thC engraving, which shows a life-size sculpture of the king in full armour on the lid of the tomb. The sides of the monument were decorated with friezes in relief.

The queen's older brother Prince Christoffer (†1363) was buried in the cathedral in Roskilde and although the tomb itself has been destroyed the alabaster figure of the prince still exists. He lies in full armour with a sword at his left side and a knife in his right hand. This monument, which must have been erected by Valdemar Atterdag, is rather stiff in execution (Fig. 2).

If we turn to the higher clergy and nobility there is a great difference in the quality and execution of sepulchral plates and tombstones. The marvellously-engraved copper plate which the Bishop of Roskilde, Niels Jacobsen Ulfeldt, had made for himself is apparently from the Netherlands. The bishop lies in his vestments with his head on a pillow, and the strictly symmetrical composition has been executed with great accuracy (Fig. 41). Unfortunately we cannot admire the plate itself today—in 1806 it was sold as scrap metal to a Roskilde copper-smith!

If one compares depictions of this plate with the tombstone of his successor as Bishop of Roskilde, Peder Jensen Lodehat, there is a remarkable difference. Here the energetic bishop is shown in an almost casual drawing which gives a very lively representation of his character. In other respects the tombstone is framed in a typical way with the symbols of the evangelists in the four corners (Fig. 26).

Only a few secular tombstones are known from Queen Margrete's time. In the church of Sakskøbing there was a fine specimen (now destroyed) to the esquire and nobleman Lasse Jensen Blå (†1408), dressed in armour (Fig. 43). The inscription band along the edge was written in Danish and not Latin as was usual. On the left side of the tombstone there was a crowned letter M, which presumably referred to Queen Margrete. We know that Lasse Jensen called her "my Lady" in a letter dated February 7th 1400, when he exchanged estates on Stevns with the queen for several smaller estates on Lolland and Falster.<sup>2</sup>

The frescoes in Denmark's many medieval churches are an invaluable treasury of art and knowledge. For the period *ca.*1350–1400 most examples are found in parish churches on Zealand. We know that castles were also decorated with frescoes, but except for a few fragments nothing remains of these. The subjects of the church paintings are of course primarily scenes from the Bible and the lives of the saints, but they often depict lively scenes from everyday life as well. The Bible stories are painted as if they took place in the Middle Ages, with people wearing the clothes of the time.

The frescoes in the church of Birkerød date from the middle of the 14thC and still show their original strong colours. The two dec-

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<sup>2</sup> The nobleman Lasse Jensen Baad exchanges property with Queen Margrete February 7 1400: Rep. Dan. 1, nr. 4317.



orated vault sections in the nave display a great variety of pictures—from Cain and Abel and the Day of Judgement to the Wheel of Fortune. In one scene depicting the weighing of souls the Virgin Mary plays a special role. She stands just beside the archangel Michael and spreads her cloak in order to protect all the repentant sinners who in their last hour cry for her intercession (Plate 9). No one can doubt what is to become of the souls who are found too light, because several unpleasant devils are about to lead the condemned down to Hell.

The frescoes in the parish church of Skamstrup are of a slightly later date. They are painted in a new, fresh manner which sets them apart from the rather stiff frescoes of Birkerød. The scene of the sailing-race from the legend of St. Olav is particularly noteworthy (Plate 5). The two ships—one is a cog and the other an impressive Nordic longship—sail proudly over the stormy waters, painted in fine detail. In the nearby church of Højby there is a very beautiful fresco showing St. Michael with huge wings about to weigh souls (Plate 20). The poor souls do not seem to have much hope as a disgusting devil is sitting on the beam. The figure of St. Michael is a masterpiece of gothic elegance in which the folds of his cloak echo his great wings.

The whole church of Højby is decorated with frescoes from about 1380, showing scenes from the Bible, the legends of the saints and moralizing scenes. One of these shows a fine knight hunting with his hawk, in exaggeratedly elegant and tight clothes, totally unaware of his horrid fate. Behind him follows the Devil, riding on an ox and ready to fire his deadly arrow (Plate 23). The moral is simple: Death will claim everyone eventually, even people of consequence who have forgotten the vanity of life. In the choir there are paintings of the Day of Judgement and the enormous jaws of Hell, into which the condemned souls are led by devils. However rescue is at hand, for out of a little cloud comes an angel who cuts their chains with his sword.

The frescoes in the parish church of Skibby are a few decades older, from around 1350. Here the forms are not as developed as those of Skamstrup and Højby. The figures are shown with over-large heads and hands, but they have their own charm. There is one fine painting of three kings riding to the hunt with their dogs. But to our horror and fear, three crowned skeletons suddenly stand before them and announce: "What we are, you shall become. What

you are, we have been!" This is a typical 'Memento Mori' ('Remember Death') which was a common theme in the art and literature of the Middle Ages.

In the church of Østofte on Lolland some very well-preserved frescoes in the choir date from about 1400 (Plate 19). Circular medallions with scenes from the seven days of Genesis are painted with a charmingly naïve touch. It has been claimed that an altarpiece from the church of St. Peter in Hamburg, made around 1380 by the German master Bertram, was the model for the Østofte paintings, but it is more likely that they have a mutual source. The medieval painters were often inspired by decorated broadsheets or book illustrations such as those in the "*Biblia pauperum*" (the Bible of the poor), where the text was illustrated by many pictures. The events of the Old Testament were understood as symbolic of events in the New Testament. Abraham's sacrifice of Isaac was seen as a parallel to the crucifixion, and the rain of manna was a symbol of the Eucharist. These double interpretations based in scholasticism were regarded as quite natural by people in the Middle Ages and the allegorical and symbolic messages of the paintings would have been obvious to them.

For those who had never learned to read or write such paintings were entertaining and instructive illustrations of Bible stories. Mass was performed in Latin and preaching in the native tongue was not yet common. But the preaching of the friars in the streets played an important role and the new Bridgettine Order attached great importance to plain explanations of the Bible to the common people. The great Father of the Church Pope Gregory (590–604) stressed, "It is one thing to worship a picture, and another to learn historically what should be worshipped by means of a picture. For in the same way as a text may instruct a man who can read, a picture can instruct the unlearned man who can only see."

We do not have space to discuss all the churches with frescoes from the time of Queen Margrete, but the paintings mentioned above constitute some of the best examples of the period.

### *Architecture*

The triumphal progress of the gothic style implied a technical and stylistic revolution in building and architecture. In the older Roman-

esque architecture the whole weight of the building was supported by walls and columns, which allowed only small round-arched windows to light the interior. But during the 13thC the new gothic style was introduced into Denmark. Now the pressure from roof and vaults could be led down through outer pillars and buttresses, which made it possible to provide the side walls with large pointed windows. While Romanesque architecture normally had flat ceilings or perhaps a barrel vault, buildings could now be given all kinds of decorative vaults. With a few exceptions public buildings were built in brick, in the characteristic tradition of architecture in the countries around the Baltic Sea.

Some very fine architecture has been preserved from Queen Margrete's time, primarily churches. Her father Valdemar Atterdag worked hard to strengthen the great royal castles of Vordingborg and Kalundborg with outer defence walls and ditches. This enabled Queen Margrete to concentrate on her wider plan of checking the power of the ambitious nobles by prohibiting all private castle building. With the exception of Gjorslev, built by the Bishop of Roskilde, we have therefore very few examples of secular architecture from this period. The medieval houses in the old towns are all of a later date.

The growing importance of the towns during the 14thC led to the need for larger churches. Often the old churches were enlarged or rebuilt in the new gothic style, of which we have some very fine examples. The choir of the church of St. Peder in Næstved (Fig. 42) was an enlargement of the old Romanesque church. To the east it ends in a heptagonal apse with high gothic windows which allow light to flood into the choir. Around the same date another gothic choir was built onto the great cathedral of St. Knud in Odense. However the architect was unable to reach an artistic level capable of matching the beautiful church which—according to an interior inscription—had been erected by bishop Gisico in 1301 (Fig. 11). Because of an underlying crypt with shrines containing the bodies of St. Knud and St. Benedikt the floor of the choir had to be raised. In this church Queen Margrete received the homage of the inhabitants of Funen on October 26th 1387.

Although the church of the Bridgittine convent in Maribo was consecrated many years after Queen Margrete's death it should be mentioned as well, since the building of the church probably began immediately after the convent was founded in 1408. According to

the rules of the Order the building began with the erection of a choir in the west (rather than the east) and continued with the western part of the church (Fig. 22). Work then stopped for a while before the last section could be finished. The length of the church is almost 60m and like the mother-church in Vadstena the aisles have the same height as the nave. Originally the church also had a choir in the east, which was reserved for the nuns, but this has been rebuilt. The Bridgettine Order admitted both men and women, but the sexes were strictly segregated. Unfortunately none of the actual convent buildings remain.

We know nothing of Queen Margrete's feelings for art and architecture as such, but perhaps we have a small hint. In 1411 she founded a chapel in the cathedral of Roskilde and ordered that it should be equipped with "two vaults with fine new stained windows, ornaments, pictures and other things as is customary, in such a way that the chapel with the help of God will be light and beautiful and good."

### *Education*

Education in the Middle Ages was a mixture of ancient Roman learning upon a Christian foundation. The study of the seven liberal arts originating from the schools of ancient Greece and Rome was a prerequisite for more advanced studies. These seven arts were grammar, rhetoric, logic, algebra, geometry, astronomy and music. The problem of the relationship between reason and faith was one of the most inflammatory debates of the Middle Ages. Although the heathen philosophers of antiquity (foremost Plato and Aristotle) were the starting point for learning it was natural to question how their ideas fitted into the Christian understanding of the world. This debate was continued through several centuries by famous scholastics such as Anselm of Canterbury, Abelard, St. Thomas Aquinas and William Ockham.

Most people were convinced of a divine explanation behind all events great or small. Everything was capable of being interpreted on several levels, and scholasticism worked on no less than four levels. One example was the definition of 'Jerusalem,' which in the historical context could be described as a Jewish city. However Jerusalem

could also be understood as a symbol or allegory of the church of Christ. A third way of interpreting it was mystical, by which Jerusalem was conceived of as God's city in heaven. Finally it could be seen as a symbol of the human soul. According to this system every text could be interpreted in different ways and on different levels; only the learned were capable of understanding all these secrets and divine revelations. Initially the universities of Paris, Bologna, Oxford and Cambridge were the leading centres of thought in Europe. The German universities of Prague, Cologne and Leipzig were founded in the 14thC. The number of students could be surprisingly high—in 1291 about 20,000 students were registered in Paris. The first university in Denmark was founded in 1475; until this date people had to study abroad. During Queen Margrete's reign the university of Prague was the main destination for Danish students, and a good many bishops of the day received their education there. This was the case with the Bishop of Roskilde, Peder Jensen Lodehat, who was registered in 1381 as a student in the faculty of law. The language of education everywhere was Latin, which gave a common background to learned people from all over Europe. In most cases an education like this led to a later career in the Church or royal administration.

### *The schools*

In Denmark most education took place in monastery schools (which primarily aimed to educate future monks for the orders) and in cathedral schools, which also received students seeking a secular career. However the main purpose of the schools was to educate priests. Students had to feed themselves and were therefore often obliged to beg for housing, food and clothing when their funds ran out. In 1411 Queen Margrete donated a sum of 1500 marks to help "poor priests to school."

We have no list of students in the cathedral schools in Queen Margrete's day, but it may have been around 500 on average. By comparison, at the beginning of the 16thC the cathedral school of Ribe had around 700 students, whereas Roskilde had around 900. In larger towns, where trade and craftsmanship led to a need for people who could read and write, a new kind of school emerged.

These so-called Latin schools, which had to be approved by the Church, became greatly important. The teachers' salaries were paid through a special tax on the citizens, whereas teachers at the cathedral schools had their income covered by the Church (the *præbender*). Before the invention of printing school books were very expensive, but the chapter libraries were open to students. The stock of books in these libraries could be considerable but only a few inventories have been preserved; one of the most interesting dates from Queen Margrete's time. On February 3rd 1379 the Archbishop of Lund issued his will, two days before his death in the castle of Hammershus. This testament contains a long list of over 40 books, ranging from Bibles, breviaries and collections of sermons to scholastic works by Petrus Lombardus and St. Thomas Aquinas.<sup>3</sup> The school in Lund was given a dictionary and three works by the classical writers Cicero, Priscian and Solinus, which the schoolmasters were instructed to take care of. The archbishop gave all his other "authors, books and poets" to the students. Unfortunately these works are not described.

One of the most popular medieval textbooks was the "Lucidarius," which means the "lightbringer." Formulated as a dialogue between a master and his pupil, various topics are discussed, from the Mass and the Holy Trinity to geography, space and the Day of Judgement. The book is written in Danish, and we can be certain that it was known during the time of Queen Margrete. At the university library in Copenhagen there is a late medieval copy of a manuscript of the "Lucidarius" from the 14thC and later it was one of the first books to be printed in Copenhagen in 1510 by Gotfred of Ghemen.

The legends of the countless saints and martyrs constituted another source of learning, and these entertaining stories could be used in sermons and teaching. One of the most popular saints was Laurentius, who according to legend was grilled alive. No less than 65 churches had Laurentius as their patron; he was surpassed only by the Holy Virgin (patroness of 91 churches) and St. Nikolai, who was patron of children and sailors. Of course the Nordic saints such as Knud the Holy and St. Olav were popular too, and their legends were often depicted on altarpieces and in frescoes.

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<sup>3</sup> The catalogue of Archbishop Niels Jensen's books: Danmarks middelalderlige Testamenter, nr. 66.

*Literature*

The glorious days of chivalry were still alive in Queen Margrete's time, and the chivalric ideals of knighthood were a source of inspiration for poetry and literature. Stories of the Holy Grail and the mysterious King Arthur and his knights were spread by travelling troubadours, and scenes from these tales were depicted in frescoes, such as those in the churches of Skibet and Hornslet. Courtly love was another inexhaustible source for the poets of the Middle Ages. The legend of "Tristan and Isolde" was among the most popular; in contrast to the moralistic writings of the Church, which often portrayed women as culpable, the description of Isolde offers quite a different picture. Courtly literature led to a kind of worship of women which was unprecedented. Knighthood involved the knight choosing a lady to worship, to praise in poems and to wear her colours in tournaments. In theory it was not supposed to be a carnal relationship and it was quite acceptable if the chosen lady was married.

There are very few examples of secular literature which have been preserved in Denmark, and they cannot be compared to the great authors of the time in Italy, England and France (Dante, Boccaccio, Geoffrey Chaucer, Christine de Pisan etc.). One example is a collection of old Danish proverbs written by Peder Låle, which to a large extent can still be heard nowadays.<sup>4</sup> They are quite difficult to translate, but a few should be mentioned: "One should follow customs or leave the country"—"All that glitters is not gold"—"A little hillock can overturn a big cartload"—"The soil is always frozen for lazy pigs"—"Law sits at the spearhead" (might is right)—"A mouse cannot fart like a horse without its backside bursting" etc.

We don't know much about Peder Låle. He can probably be identified with a Danish cleric mentioned in several papal letters from 1331-2 called "Petrus Nicolai alias dictus Lalo." The 1200 proverbs were meant to serve as texts in the schools and they are written in Danish and translated into Latin. The book was printed for the first time in 1506 and became very popular.

Ballads and folksongs are another important source for our understanding of Danish medieval literature.<sup>5</sup> Unfortunately the oral

<sup>4</sup> 'Peder Laales gammeldanske Ordsprog,' Ed. Aage Hansen. 1966.

<sup>5</sup> 'Danske Folkeviser i Udvalg'. I-II. Ed. Ernst Frandsen. Kbh. 1937.

tradition means that the original versions evolved until they were written down during the 16thC. The ballads often tell a long story with dramatic themes of love, death, murder and sorcery. They were performed by one singer and everyone else joined the refrain. It is likely that people danced during the ballads; this tradition still exists on the Faroe Islands. A fine fresco with such a chain-pattern dance can be seen in the church of Ørslev on Zealand. It seems these dancers came from the high nobility for the women have crowns on their heads and the gentlemen wear the finest new fashions in contrasting colours.

I will not try to translate the ballads, because it is almost impossible to convey the expressions and melody of language which characterizes them. As a result of the oral tradition we often have several slightly different versions of the same song. In 1591 the first collection of ballads was published by Anders Sørensen Vedel, but several of the hundred folksongs included were subjected to censorship and had new moralizing verses added. Today there is a repertoire of around 540 ballads, which constitutes an invaluable source for our knowledge of Danish medieval poetry.



## CHAPTER TWENTY-FOUR

### EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE COUNTRY AND THE TOWNS

During Queen Margrete's reign there were significant changes in agricultural conditions. Several serious crises (probably linked to the steep decline in population following the mid-14thC plague) led to many villages being abandoned and fields left uncultivated. This great decline in the cultivated land area led to greater social equality within the peasant class. Farms became more uniform in size and the shortage of labour for field-work meant many farmers turned to animal husbandry and cattle breeding.<sup>1</sup> Unfortunately we have only few documentary sources for this development, so our knowledge is primarily based on archaeology.

However the increasing power of the nobility meant that copyholders gradually became still more dependent. What had previously been a voluntary lease in which the copyholder had full rights to terminate his tenancy and leave, now developed into a situation in which the nobility tried to prohibit the peasants from leaving. This attempt resulted from the feudal system and the principle that when peasants sought the protection of a magnate they had to give up their independence according to the law. It was almost impossible to prevent abuses of power, although the Crown tried repeatedly to stop exploitation of the peasants. In King Oluf's coronation charter of 1376 it was emphasized that peasants had full rights to leave their tenancies. This must have been disputed, as later the royal council had to deliver an official response to the chancellor reiterating that, "When a peasant has given notice to terminate his tenancy at the proper time, he can go freely wherever he wants." Another part of the reply reveals how serious the exploitation could be. The chancellor had asked whether the landlord was within his rights to give

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<sup>1</sup> See particularly: Erik Ulsig, 1968 and C. Porskrog Rasmussen, 2000. Erik Ulsig: "Kronens kamp for bevarelsen af skattegodset 1241-1396". In: *Profiler i nordisk senmiddelalder og renaissance*. Festskrift til Poul Enemark, pp. 203-219. Aksel E. Christensen: *Ret og magt i dansk middelalder*. Gyldendal 1978. Svend Gissel: "The late Medieval Agrarian Crisis in Denmark", p. 238 etc. *Danish Medieval History—New Currents*. Kbh., 1981.

away the daughters of his peasants in marriage. The answer was blunt: the peasant himself held the right to give his daughters in marriage, not the landlord.<sup>2</sup>

### *The nobility*

Although Queen Margrete sought to limit the nobles' power in every way possible during her reign, life was much easier for them than for the peasants. In rank they were divided into knights and esquires, but this had nothing to do with a nobleman's economic status. Instead it depended on his family's position and of course his personal abilities. It was the ambition of most nobles to be knighted. The ideals of knighthood implied the possession of Christian virtues, a concept rooted in the time of the early crusades. Bernhard of Clairvaux (†1153), the renowned founder of the Cistercian Order, defined the purpose of knighthood as follows: "The knight shall fight a double fight, both against flesh and blood and against the spiritual power of lust and evil. A knight whose soul is dressed in the armour of faith in the same way as his body is shielded by armour of metal will truly be a knight without fear. Armed with weapons of both kinds he fears neither the devil nor man and his death is a martyr's death."

By the 14thC the time of the great crusades was past and the popes tried in vain to rally the Christian world to recapture Jerusalem. The Christian knight had become integrated into the feudal society of Europe, and the thought of leaving everything to be slaughtered by a barbarian pagan was not very tempting. Nevertheless tournaments continued as a blend of sport and weaponry displays and they were a set feature of great occasions. Sometimes 'sharp weapons' were used during the fights and it was not unknown for participants to be killed.

Thus a knight had moral obligations and the training of a young nobleman in the use of arms was followed by his instruction in courteous behaviour and the protection of the poor and weak. It was expected that proper behaviour would follow from a certain level of

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<sup>2</sup> The document issued by the royal council is published in: "Den danske rigsløvgivning indtil år 1400". Ed. E. Kroman, pp. 330–334.

cultural education. We may doubt how far these principles were followed in the real world, but the ideals lived on and contributed to the self-esteem of the nobility for centuries. The ceremony of knighthood was often connected to a particular battle or royal celebrations for a coronation or wedding.

During the frequent wars of the period the nobility had to pay for their privileges with men and weapons. This meant a landlord could be away for the greater part of the year and had to hand over the administration of his estates to his wife. These noblewomen played a central role in the daily running of estates and were also responsible for the considerable number of people who worked in the manor itself. It is difficult to form an idea of their general level of education, but presumably many learned to read and write in addition to their training in the essential female skills of sewing, weaving and cooking. A lady of the higher nobility might have several servants for her personal attendance. A close friend of Queen Margrete, Ida Pedersdatter Falk, mentions more than ten such servants in her will, among them a lady's companion, a secretary and the exotic figure of a female dwarf who entertained on suitable occasions.

As noted in a previous chapter, nobles' castles differed widely in both size and the degree of comfort offered. Queen Margrete was constantly on her way from one royal castle to another and occasionally the court halted at a private castle during the journey. The resident nobleman was obliged to offer free hospitality—which often proved expensive.

Nevertheless life in the manor offered opportunities for leisure unavailable to the peasantry. Many popular games such as draughts and chess are still played today. The latter was a favourite among the nobility and the Church even permitted the clergy to play. Curiously enough we know that Queen Margrete played chess, because in the will of Archbishop Niels Jonassen Bild, dated 1379, it is stated that a certain lady should inherit "a chessboard, which I received from the Queen of Norway" (*'uno ludo scacorum, quem habuimus de domina regina Norvegie'*).<sup>3</sup>

The popularity of this game meant that chessmen were often made with great skill and many beautiful examples carved from walrus

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<sup>3</sup> The will of Archbishop Niels Jonassen Bild, 1379: Testamenter fra Danmarks Middelalder indtil 1450. Ed. Erslev, nr. 66.

ivory have been found. Most have emerged during archaeological excavations, such as the four chessmen, three round draughts pieces and 13 dice discovered at the royal castle of Vordingborg. A beautiful chess-piece of walrus tusk was found in 1841 during the dredging of an inlet in Jutland (Fig. 44). The carving shows a queen sitting in stately style on a horse, surrounded by attendants and young maids.

### *The Norse settlements in Greenland*

During the Middle Ages parts of Greenland were populated by Norse settlers. After being outlawed in 982 the Viking Erik the Red had fled from Iceland to begin his famous voyage of discovery, during which he explored the southwest coast of Greenland. Many of the deep inlets were suitable for habitation, and numerous immigrants from Iceland led to a rapid increase in colonization. Two settlements were founded, the 'Eastern Village' near the present town of Julianehåb and the 'Western Village' near the present town of Godthåb. The Eastern Village was by far the most fertile area and on this spot Erik the Red built his manor, near Brattahlid at the end of Erik's Inlet.<sup>4</sup>

The settlements seem to have become established quickly and when Christianity was introduced about the year 1000 a new era began. The sagas relate that in time no less than 12 churches and two monasteries were built in the Eastern Village, whereas the Western Village had only four churches. Probably the parishes were small, with about 200 people for each church, but nevertheless the number is remarkable, particularly as several of the stone-built churches were of considerable size.

Most of these churches have been located by archaeologists. The famous church of Hvalsey still stands as a spectacular ruin, lacking only its roof. It was built between 1100 and 1150, and the style appears to have been inspired by the churches of the Orkney Islands, where ships from Greenland often stopped on their way to Norway. Soon a bishopric was founded at Gardar near Brattahlid, and archaeological excavation has revealed impressive building works. The cathedral itself, consecrated to St. Nikolai the patron of sailors, was 27m

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<sup>4</sup> Knud J. Krogh: Viking Greenland. The National Museum 1967.

long and almost 16m broad. At right angles to it was the bishop's house; this was added to over time until it was 50m in length. In addition there were sheepfolds and byres for nearly 100 cows. Due to the cold climate it was impossible to cultivate the earth, so basic nutrition must have relied on animal husbandry and hunting (primarily seals and whales).

In 1973 an irrigation system of canals connected to an embankment was found in Gardar. A reservoir had been created which made it possible to regulate supplies of water to the vital pastures.<sup>5</sup> But in spite of these brave attempts to secure the settlements, the Western Village had to be abandoned in the middle of the 14thC. Communication with Norway had declined and after the settlers no longer used their own shipping, several years could pass before a merchant ship arrived.

From 1261 the settlements had belonged to the Norwegian king, who zealously guarded the trade monopoly with Greenland. However the only products of real value were walrus ivory and the long, twisted narwhal horns which in many parts of Europe were thought to come from unicorns.

In 1389 officials from Bergen and Helgeland in Norway reported to Queen Margrete that several Norwegians had been trading illegally since "they had bought and sold on Greenland without permission from the royal court of justice."<sup>6</sup> The Norwegians claimed that they had almost been wrecked and had been forced to beach their badly-damaged ships. Nothing more is heard of the case, so presumably it was suspended.

When Bishop Alf died in 1378 he was the last bishop to be buried in Greenland. After this no prelate ventured to the cold bishopric in the north, even though one after another was appointed Bishop of Gardar up to about 1500. It must have been bitter for the Christian population to be let down in this way, but the real reason for their decline must be sought in Greenland itself. Probably a worsening climate was one of the main causes, with other contributing factors.

The last sure evidence of the Greenland settlers is an account of a wedding in the church of Hvalsø on September 16th 1408. The parish priest Sira Paal Halvardsson married Thorstein Olafsson and

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<sup>5</sup> Knud J. Krogh: "Kunstvanding—hemmeligheden bag Grønlandsbispens hundrede kør". Nationalmuseets Arbejdsmark 1974, s. 71–80.

<sup>6</sup> The case of illegal trading to Greenland 1389: Dipl.D. 4 rk. bnd. 4, nr. 32.

Sigrid Bjørnsdatter and the following year their marriage certificate was sealed in Gardar. Many of the people at the wedding were Icelanders who had been forced off course in bad weather on their way home from Norway. They remained in Greenland for four years and their account of the wedding is the last news we have of the settlers.

In 1921 excavations in the churchyard of Herjolfsnes near Cape Farewell revealed several exceptional finds which surpass any found elsewhere in European countries. The dead had been buried in their everyday clothes, which had been preserved almost intact by the permafrost (Fig. 45). Most of the clothes were made of rough home-spun sheep's wool, and could be dated to the last part of the 14thC. Surprisingly it was evident that the settlers had tried to follow new trends in European fashion. No less than 17 liripipe hoods with long ribbons were found in very fine condition. These clothes belonging to men, women and children are kept in Greenland and in the National Museum in Copenhagen, where several pieces are on display. The clothes are now brown, but originally they would have been dyed in many different colours.

We will never know when the last settlers died, but today the ruins of their farms and churches bear witness to a strange chapter in Nordic history.

### *The towns*

During the 14thC the towns grew considerably in economic importance. Following the agricultural crises many peasants moved to the urban centres in hope of work and a better future. The towns were a focus for craftsmanship, and the increased self-awareness of the craftsmen led to the foundation of a growing number of guilds. All the larger towns had their own municipal charter and city court. The town council was usually headed by one or two mayors.

As already noted, the number of inhabitants was very small compared to the present day. Even in Copenhagen, whose importance grew considerably during Queen Margrete's reign, the population scarcely exceeded 10,000. It was not yet the Danish capital as the court was constantly on the move between the great royal castles, but gradually Copenhagen gained prominence—even though the city was owned by the Bishop of Roskilde until 1416.

Copenhagen was badly damaged in 1368 during the war with the Hanseatic League. The royal castle, which stood on the same site as the present Christiansborg, was pulled down stone by stone by the Germans after the garrison's surrender. Reconstruction of the city began after the Treaty of Stralsund and in the 1370s the Bishop of Roskilde ordered a list of all properties in the city in order to have a reliable basis for the imposition of taxes.<sup>7</sup> This list registers 560 sites, of which 147 are defined as *curiae*, implying they were developed sites with proper buildings and houses. Sixty-two *tabernae* are listed as well; these were probably small shops and stalls. There were five churches—the great Our Lady, which was the main church of the city, three parish churches named after their patron saints St. Peter, St. Nikolai and St. Clemens, and finally the church belonging to the hospital of the Holy Spirit. Strangely enough there was only one monastery in the city in Queen Margrete's time, the great Franciscan house of four red-brick wings built around an inner courtyard. Municipal administration was based in the centrally-located city hall, near the church of Our Lady. The university was not founded until 1479.

The bishop's list gives a clear picture of the occupation and social status of the citizens, based on their surnames: Morten Suder (shoemaker), Claus Badstuemand (owner of a public bath), Lusse Kålkone (a woman kale-seller), Esben Dynemager (featherbed-maker), Niels Smed (smith) etc. It is also evident that there were a great many German inhabitants, since almost a quarter of the 400 citizens have German names. One of the streets was in fact called *Tyskemannegaden*, which means the street of the Germans.

At the end of the 14thC Copenhagen became an important centre for trade and craft. The artisans united into crafts guilds, which secured a monopoly for members, controlled quality and prices and provided social security for the needy. The 1403 charter of the bakers' guild in Copenhagen has been preserved.<sup>8</sup> This document, written on 10 pages of parchment, begins by announcing the foundation of the brotherhood with St. Karin as their patron saint. There are

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<sup>7</sup> The *cadaster* of the Roskilde bishopric is published by: C.A. Christensen in "Danske Middelalderlige Regnskaber", 3 rk. vol. 1. Kbh. 1956.

<sup>8</sup> Published in: "Danmarks Gilde- og Lavsskraaer fra Middelalderen". Ed. C. Nyrop 1899–1900.

37 sections giving the laws and statutes of the guild, from which I will quote a few typical clauses:

4. If one of our brethren should fall ill and has nothing to eat, then the brethren shall help him with four shillings from the money chest, and if the sick person has spent this money and is not yet better, then he shall have another four shillings. If he recovers he shall pay back the money to the chest when he receives his first salary.
9. If a brother enters while two other brethren are playing together at dice and he conceals it and it is discovered afterwards, then he must pay two English shillings, as must those who were playing (gambling was forbidden).
18. If a brother strikes another brother on his jaw or on the cheek, he must pay with two marks' worth of wax.
21. If a brother drinks so much that he vomits before we all drink together, then he must pay a *grot*. If a brother spills beer over another brother when we drink together, he must pay a *hvid*.
25. No journeyman may work as a baker unless he serves as we have done before him, according to the statutes in the charter.
28. All men, journeymen, women or maids, who become our brothers and sisters, shall give hand to the master of the guild, the provider and all the brethren and promise to observe the laws of our charter.
32. A brother who spills so much beer in front of him at the table that neither he nor the provider can cover it with his hand must pay two *penning*.
36. When we place a barrel of beer in the guild and several of our brethren stay at home annoyed and will not join the party, they must pay for half of their beer.

Other clauses state that if one of the brethren died, all were obliged to watch over the body during the night. At the funeral the brothers were not allowed to attend the service without trousers or shirt. First and foremost the guild was a social and religious corporation, but to retain its privileges it had to exercise strict quality control on the goods produced. Women were allowed to join and the list of members included several women. In general, brewing and baking seem to have been crafts in which women could run a business of their own.



The towns were reserved for the citizens, primarily artisans and merchants. Thus the municipal charter of Copenhagen forbade the nobility to buy houses in town, but its growing economic importance meant that some noblemen tried to bypass the regulations—such as the *drost* Henning Podebusk, who owned several sites in the city centre. In order to gain citizenship one had to pay a special fee and bind oneself to carry on a civil trade. Of course most of the extant written sources from Queen Margrete's time are documents concerning the purchase and sale of houses and sites. It is not often that we find references to daily life, but occasionally there are a few details. On April 25th 1406 the royal official at the castle of Copenhagen, Anders Laurensen, conveyed a house in the *Tyskemannegaden* to a man called Thomas Tagesen on behalf of the Bishop of Roskilde. This transaction resulted from the tragic death of a previous owner of the house; a woman called Berta had hung herself "urged by the devil" and according to law the house had passed to the bishop.<sup>9</sup>

The basis for maintaining justice in the city was the municipal charter issued by Bishop Johannes Krag in 1294.<sup>10</sup> It contained 107 clauses including stipulations on trade in the marketplaces, conditions of citizenship, punishments for various crimes etc. We also find strict rules to prevent superfluous luxury: "Nobody who celebrates a wedding is allowed to have more than 30 covers and five courses." There was even a special fee due to the bishop and the magistrate. There were regulations on leprosy as well; if a man had caught the disease "he could not be forced to enter the house of the lepers as long as he avoided public company." The leper house stood outside the city in order to prevent the spread of this feared disease.

In general terms the municipal charter of Copenhagen gives a vivid impression of life in the city which later became the capital of Denmark.

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<sup>9</sup> Berta's house in the *Tyskemannegaden*: K.D. 1, s. 133–134.

<sup>10</sup> The municipal charter of Copenhagen, 1294: K.D. 1, s. 33–59. nr. 33.

## CHAPTER TWENTY-FIVE

### ASSESSMENTS OF QUEEN MARGRETE THROUGH THE CENTURIES

When Boccaccio wrote his book on famous women in the 1360s, he introduced it with the words: “When one admires men who have created a masterpiece with their gifts, how much more must women be admired, whom nature has given a weak body and feeble spiritual gifts, when in spite of this they dare to stand forward and accomplish great things which are difficult even for men.”

Whether his judgement of women’s intellectual capacity was typical of his time is difficult to tell, but the 14thC was a period in which the old views of women were revised. A personality like Christine de Pisan would have been unthinkable in the previous century, while Geoffrey Chaucer’s bold character sketches of women from all social levels were quite free of the moralizing of the Church. Women began to take part in politics at the highest level; an excellent example is the holy Birgitta. There is little doubt that this powerful woman greatly influenced Queen Margrete.

However Queen Margrete was not the only woman reigning in Europe at this time. In the kingdom of Naples, which then included all of southern Italy, Queen Joanna I came to power in 1343 and reigned until her deposition in 1381. The queens of Poland and Hungary acted temporarily as regents, but only until they remarried. Nevertheless Queen Margrete’s powerful position as elected ruler in three kingdoms must be regarded as exceptional. She stabilized Denmark internally and also succeeded in uniting the Nordic countries and halting the expansion of the Hanseatic League. At the beginning of her reign many people were sceptical of her political abilities, but the critical voices soon fell silent.

Assessments of her character and achievements are of course very varied but seem to agree that she was unusually intelligent—whether this was called treacherous ingenuity or wisdom. Only rarely do we catch a glimpse of the person behind the official mask, for example in her letter to her husband King Haakon in 1370, when she was only 17 years old, and later in her famous instructions to King Erik.

Otherwise her official documents and public actions must speak for her.

Among the nobility, whose power was considerably diminished during her reign, feelings for the queen cannot have been warm. However many must have realized that the Crown had to be strengthened. General opinion among the population is difficult to assess today, although a Norwegian letter from 1414 gives some interesting hints. The writer emphasized that "she would help all to fairness and equal rights, strengthen justice and suppress all injustice, for which God reward her."<sup>1</sup> Of course these could be empty phrases, but in her legislation and general charity the queen cared for the lower classes and the poor.

In her own time people wondered how it was possible for a woman to achieve so many victories. During negotiations for King Erik's marriage with the English Princess Philippa the leader of the Danish delegation, Bishop Eystein of Oslo, had a conversation with a cleric from the monastery of St. Albans, who later wrote an account of their meeting. He described how dangerous an enemy Queen Margrete (called Amaronia) had been to many nations by "refusing female effeminacy and dressing in the armour of a warrior." This was followed by a lot of rubbish about her route to the throne, which the cleric seems mostly to have misunderstood.<sup>2</sup>

The ballad about the battle of Falköping takes as its starting point the theme of woman's victory over man. King Albrecht scoffs at the queen for her female weakness and swears never to wear any headgear until she is defeated. After the battle the queen mockingly takes him at his word and dresses her fine prisoner in a rough liripipe hood with a long ribbon. It is likely that the ballad was first sung shortly after the battle, and although it probably changed in several details before it was written down around 1540, the general theme remained. Another account of the battle was given in the chronicle of Scania, which added: "Honoured be God for all eternity for this unexpected victory in the hands of a woman."

After her death assessments were closely related to the differing views of her main achievement, the founding of the Nordic Union.

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<sup>1</sup> Assessments of Queen Margrete: Dipl.N. X, nr. 124, p. 97 ff.

<sup>2</sup> The English cleric's account: Chron. monas. S. Albani. Ed. Henry Thomas Riley. London 1868, s. 412.

In the Danish Rhymed Chronicle, written in the monastery of Sorø around 1470, we find the following famous and frequently quoted stanzas (here in a rough translation):<sup>3</sup>

The cord which is braided with three strands  
Will rarely break.  
This was said by a wise man, in truth,  
If the cord is braided gently.  
I (i.e. queen Margrete) made a cord this strong  
When I won the crown of Sweden,  
And inherited Norway with Denmark,  
So that they could all be secured.  
No violence or power in this world  
Can harm these kingdoms  
If they preserve the union  
Which I have made . . .

There can be no doubt of the author's high opinion of the union. But it appears in a different light if we look at the Swedish Rhymed Chronicle (the so-called Karl's Chronicle), written around 1440.<sup>4</sup> At this time discontent in Sweden over the powerful position of the Danes had broken out in open rebellion, and the chronicler looked on Queen Margrete's assumption of power as a sad event:

It happened then  
That the Swedes paid homage to a Danish woman.  
She was named Queen Margareta.  
Indeed one would have to look far  
To find a person who with such prudence  
was able to unite these kingdoms.  
Very seldom is such a woman born.  
I don't think that the Swedes were wise,  
When they chose her as their leader.

Even sharper is the judgement in another Swedish chronicle: "She was very miserly. With incredible cunning she subdued three kingdoms, which she degraded to almost nothing. Nobody was able to resist her cleverness. This is the opinion of Margrete among Swedes

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<sup>3</sup> The Rhymed Chronicle: *Den danske Rimkronike*. Ed. Helge Toldberg. Vol. 1–3. 1958–61. Strofe 4749–4764, p. 131. The rhymed chronicle was printed as the first book in Danish in 1495.

<sup>4</sup> The Swedish Rhymed Chronicle: *Nya eller Karls-Krönikan*: Ud. G.E. Klemming. Stockholm 1866, s. 1, lines 5–14.

and some noble Danes as well. Only the clergy regard her as very religious and pious.”

A very similar estimate appears in the *Chronicle of Holstein*, written in 1448. Here her cunning is stressed again and again and the chronicler describes her bluntly as “the instigator of all these misfortunes.”

After the final dissolution of the Nordic Union around 1520 and the growing hatred between Denmark and Sweden, differences of opinion grew over Queen Margrete. In Denmark people looked back to the bygone days of glory with yearning and these feelings were reflected in exaggerated praise of the queen. In 1573 Rasmus Michael Glad (Erasmus M. Lætus) wrote a long poem in Latin about her victorious war against King Albrecht. He dedicated his work to Queen Elizabeth of England, whom he apparently thought could profit by knowing the story of Queen Margrete. However the work has no historical value.<sup>5</sup>

Of much greater importance is the work of a well-known Danish historian, the royal chancellor Arild Huitfeldt (1546–1609), who in his great “*Chronicle of the kingdom of Denmark*” wrote a very sober and professional description of Queen Margrete’s reign. For the first time many documents and chronicles were quoted (often in full) and analysed, following his indefatigable efforts to collect these sources in archives and libraries. He concluded his description of Queen Margrete’s reign as follows: “A praiseworthy, acute, ingenious and wise Lady in everything regarding government and administration. Her father said that Nature had dealt wrongly with her. She should have been a man, but was born a woman.”<sup>6</sup>

In the visual arts—which favoured allegorical and patriotic themes during the 17th and 18th centuries—the glorious days of the queen’s reign were given much attention. In 1637 the Danish King Christian IV ordered his engraver Simon de Pas to employ the best painters from the Netherlands to make sketches for 84 paintings illustrating “the brave and heroic achievements” of the king’s ancestors, to be hung in the great hall of Kronborg castle. Among the artists selected

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<sup>5</sup> Erasmi Michaelii Laeti: *Margareticorum, hoc est, De conflictu Gotthico: in quo Margaretae Danorum Reginae auspicijs, Albertus Megapolensis Succiae Rex captus regnoque; . . . Francoforti ad Moenum MDLXXIU.*

<sup>6</sup> Arild Huitfeldt: *Danmarks Riges Krøøike. Kvartudg. Kbh. 1596–1603.* Reprinted 1976.

was the famous Gerrit van Honthorst of Utrecht (1590–1656). His great painting shows Queen Margrete receiving the crown of Sweden from a humbly-kneeling King Albrecht and his son after the battle of Falköping (Fig. 47).

The Nordic Union was also a favourite theme and in 1784 the Danish artist Erik Paulsen painted an allegory with this motif. The picture shows Queen Margrete on her throne with the young King Erik at her side. On the four steps leading to the throne stand three beautiful women symbolizing Denmark, Norway and Sweden. At the queen's command they shake hands and a dignified archbishop blesses the happy union (Plate 25). To be honest the painting is no masterpiece; Erik Paulsen was much better at landscapes.

The well-known Danish comic writer Ludvig Holberg was also a respected historian and in his "History of the kingdom of Denmark" of 1732–35 he included an important section on Queen Margrete. He concluded that the founding of the Nordic Union proved "the skill of the great queen and constituted an ornament to Danish History, since in everything she always appeared to govern with promptness, the best policy and more than a man's courage and heart—all qualities which are needed to achieve such a difficult task and bring three bellicose kingdoms under one head. They did not appreciate how great this achievement was until after the death of this wise queen. History shows that it was impossible for her descendants to maintain the edifice which she had built with such skill and wisdom."<sup>7</sup>

Holberg's text was based on the work of Arild Huitfeldt, but in his judgements he displayed his own opinions. His view of female regents is completely free of the usual conventions of his time. When in 1745 he published the book "Comparative stories of several heroines and famous ladies" he introduced it with the remark that all regimes are good if only the regents are "virtuous and skilled," whether they are male or female. In justification he asserted, "Denmark has never been as highly estimated as under Margrete, and the wealth of England testifies to the prudence of Queen Elizabeth's government." This comparison was probably inspired by the poem of Rasmus Glad.

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<sup>7</sup> The books by Holberg are published in: "Ludvig Holbergs Samlede Skrifter". Ed. C.S. Petersen. Vol. 1–18. Cph. 1813–1963.

Besides these literary and artistic works there were a great many popular myths and legends about Queen Margrete, and countless locations bear her name. One of the best-known legends tells that once when King Valdemar Atterdag was about to mount his horse, he became lost in deep thought. At the same time a criminal was being dragged to the scaffold, and when he passed the king he cried for mercy. The king said, "If within one year and one day you can tell me what I was thinking just now, and tell me if it will be fulfilled, then I will pardon you." The prisoner travelled far and wide to find the answer, but in vain. One night he came to the great cliff of Borbjerg on the coast of Jutland and there he saw a little manikin who he asked for advice. However the manikin said that he should rather ask his great-grandfather in Daugbjerg Dås, who was much wiser. So the prisoner hurried on, but the manikin in Daugbjerg Dås could only say that possibly his great-great-grandfather knew, and he lived under the Redstone in Fur. Finally the prisoner reached Fur, and the exceedingly old manikin told him that King Valdemar had been thinking of how he could unite Denmark, Norway and Sweden. The manikin predicted: "This might well happen, but it will be his daughter who will achieve this." With this message the prisoner returned to the king on the final day and when King Valdemar heard him, he pardoned the man immediately.

During the romantic period of the 19thC the heroes of the nation were praised in art and literature. In 1836 the author B.S. Ingemann wrote a long historical poem about Queen Margrete which achieved great popularity. Her dramatic life was also well-suited to the theatre and in the 1830s the poet Oehlenschläger wrote a play called "Queen Margrete". It was later transformed into an opera which was performed at the Royal Theatre in Copenhagen in 1894.

Nineteenth-century assessments of Queen Margrete were closely connected to an idealistic popular movement called 'Scandinavism'. The Nordic Union was regarded as a realisation of the dream of a strong and effective defence against the Germans. In this view the union symbolised the mutual interests of the three kingdoms and their populations. It was not until 1882 that the historian Kristian Erslev came to terms with these rather naïve ideas in his valuable work on Queen Margrete's reign. Instead he concluded that the founding of the Nordic Union aimed "to create a Danish kingdom which covered the whole of Scandinavia—in other words something quite different from a union."

To a great extent the views of Kristian Erslev have been accepted by later historians in the 20thC. The Swedish historian Erik Lönnroth has analysed the differing political opinions underlying the founding of the Nordic Union, and his theories have inspired new discussions. Recently Anders Bøgh has focussed on the queen's rise to power up to 1389 in an interesting new thesis. But although the former romantic patriotism has been replaced today by sound scepticism, the dramatic story of Queen Margrete is unlikely ever to lose its fascination.



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